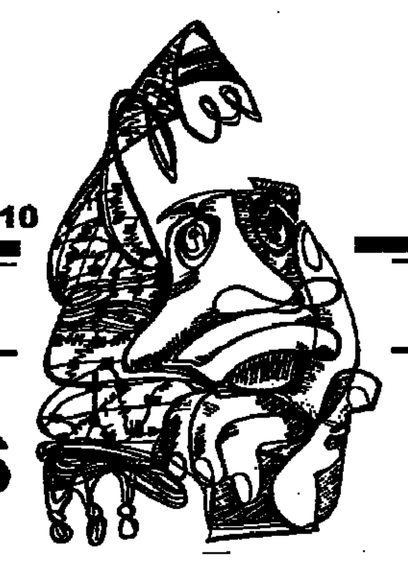
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Arafat, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Immunity lost

PARLIAMENT Speaker Fathi Sorour has agreed to lift former Economy Minister Mustafa El-Said's parliamentary immunity from facing criminal charges related to his business dealings. El-Said is a member of the ruling National Democratic Party and heads the parliament's Economic Committee.

The Legislative Committee in parliament approved a request by prosecutors to lift El-Said's immunity a few months ago. But when the issue was raised before the full assembly, it was voted down by a majority of deputies. However, because the People's Assembly is currently in its summer recess, the speaker has the power to take decisions on requests presented by the minister of justice to lift the immunity of any member facing charges.

Israeli raids

TWO elderly Lebanese shepherds were killed and four civilians wounded in Israeli air strikes against Hizbollah targets in south Lebanon on Tuesday.

Mohamed Hassan Muzahem, 72, was killed while tending his flock after Israeli warplanes fired missiles at the Jebel Al-Dahr hilltop in the first raid, hospital officials said. Another shepherd, Ali Moussa Akl, 72, was taken to hospital but later died from his wounds.

Also on Tuesday, a 21-year-old Lebanese civilian, Ziad Jahjah, was killed by the explosion of a roadside bomb on the Kfarhouna-Jezzine Road in the Israeli-occupied 'security zone' in south Lebanon. Hizbollah has often used roadside bombs to attack Israeli occupation troops and their agents, the South Lebanon Army.

Iraqi oil

IRAQ'S Oil Minister Lt. Gen. Amer Mohamed Rashid said yesterday that Baghdad expected quick UN approval of its new oil pricing mechanism and may export two million barrels a day to make up for lost time.

Rashid's remarks were made at a news conference a day after Iraq presented its pricing proposal to the United Nations in New York. If it is approved, Iraq can resume exporting oil under the special oil-for-food programme which allows the country to sell $2 billion worth of crude oil every six months to buy food and medicine.

Libya visit

FAMILIES of victims of the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, paid an unprecedented visit to Libya, the country accused of being behind the bombing, and met its justice minister on Tuesday.

The official Libyan News Agency, JANA, reported that a delegation representing the 270 victims of the bombing discussed with Justice Minister Mohamed Al-Zouai proposals aimed at ending the deadlock over the Lockerbie affair and guaranteeing a fair trial for the two Libyans suspected of carrying out the bombing.

INSIDE

Faint hope, bitter choices

Despite appeals by Egypt, Jordan, the Arab League and the US, Binyamin Netanyahu is refusing to lift the crippling sanctions clamped on the Palestinians



An Israeli policeman stands guard as a bulldozer demolishes a Palestinian home in Arab East Jerusalem — one of three Palestinian-built houses which were demolished this week by order of the Jerusalem municipality upon Netanyahu's approval *(photo: AFP)*

Pessimism is the word now most associated with the future of the Oslo peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. Officials and diplomats concede that the principal task at this stage is to take "elementary steps" to prevent the "total burial" of the peace process rather than to forge ahead with efforts to achieve a comprehensive and just settlement.

But for Palestinian Agriculture Minister Abdel-Jawad Saleh, even such "elementary steps" are futile. "Netanyahu has already buried the peace process. What we need now is not a sign here and there that tension is easing, but a drastic change of approach." This, Saleh is convinced, is extremely unlikely to come from Netanyahu.

Palestinian-Israeli peace-making was placed in "intensive care" following Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's decision last March to build a Jewish settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. It received another crippling blow with last week's suicide bombings in the western section of the holy city that left 15 people dead and more than 150 wounded.

Palestinian officials believe that Netanyahu has seized upon the attack to shirk his Oslo commitments. "It was as if Netanyahu was waiting for this to happen so that he could, once and for all, disassociate himself from the commitments Israel made under the Oslo agreements," Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Ereikat told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview.

Israel's blockade of Palestinian territories, Ereikat said, showed that "Netanyahu is intent on taking three million Palestinians hostage, denying them their basic rights, at a time when there is no proof whatsoever that the two men who carried out the attack came from the Palestinian self-rule territories or are Palestinians in the first place."

President Hosni Mubarak, following talks in Cairo on Tuesday with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, warned that the sanctions weakened Yasser Arafat's pro-peace camp and strengthened the hand of Islamist radicals. The Arab League called for an immediate halt to Israel's reprisal measures and Jordan's King Hussein dispatched Crown Prince Hassan to Jerusalem yesterday to press for a lifting of the blockade.

And, according to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, "despite the fact that we lament the loss of lives that occurred as a result of the blast, we cannot really over-do things. We cannot put the blame on Arafat" because he cannot be held responsible for security in West Jerusalem.

Netanyahu, though, appears intent on rejecting the appeals. According to Ereikat, "While Levy was talking peace in Cairo, his government was busy making life impossible for three million people."

Touring the site of the 30 July suicide bombings, Netanyahu repeated accusations that the Palestinian Authority was not doing enough to combat anti-Israeli violence, and brushed aside a US statement that Israeli sanctions, which include suspending the transfer of $40 million in tax revenue Israel owes the Palestinians, were "counter-productive."

Israel, nevertheless, slightly eased some of the sanctions yesterday, letting Palestinian workers into Jewish settlements and Israeli-controlled industrial zones in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel also re-opened the international border with Egypt, allowing hundreds of Palestinians who had been stranded at Rafah back into the Gaza Strip.

But the borders between Palestinian territories and Israel remain sealed, keeping more than 50,000 Palestinian workers from their jobs, and a military blockade of the eight self-rule towns of the West Bank remains in place.

Arafat, confronted by two bitter choices, faces an impossible situation. He must either fall in with Israeli demands to go after Hamas and Jihad in the self-rule areas or Israel will do so itself, destroying whatever remains of the Oslo process. Netanyahu seems to believe that, by "using the stick," Arafat will bend to his will. Palestinians demand that their leader resist.

America's special Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is expected in Israel at the end of this week to throw Washington's weight into the effort to resolve the crisis. But Netanyahu's rejection of the calls for moderation appeared to offer little hope for a quick breakthrough.

Ereikat chided the United States and other sponsors of the peace process for their "faint and weak" response to Netanyahu's policies. "Netanyahu is exploiting the bombing to blackmail the Palestinian Authority while implementing his policy of demolishing homes and confiscating lands," he told reporters, referring to the Israeli drive to destroy Arab homes built without proper authorisation in occupied areas.

Early yesterday, the Israeli army arrested 20 Palestinians suspected of "terrorist activity" in the West Bank, bringing the total number of Palestinians arrested since the bombings to 176.

"The overall measures taken by Israel in reaction to the blast are making things very difficult for Arafat and his Authority at a time when they are already facing a problem because of the corruption charges leveled against several Palestinian cabinet ministers," said an Egyptian diplomat who asked that his name be withheld.

Despite the efforts to ease tensions, the Egyptian diplomat remains "very pessimistic". He pointed out that "the signals" coming from the Israelis did not provide sufficient indication that they wanted to go ahead with the peace process. "I think that, as long as Netanyahu remains in power, any progress will be very slow," he said. *(see pp.2&4)*

***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo,*
***Graham Usher** in Jerusalem,*
Wire dispatches

Forever *Aida*

Preparations are in full swing for a spectacular production of Verdi's *Aida* at Queen Hatshepsut's Temple near Luxor. Rehab Saad reports

Officials at the Cairo Opera House are confident that a spectacular production of *Aida* on the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor in October will attract a record number of visitors, including some of the wealthiest people in the world. The opera, which celebrates the love story of an Egyptian conqueror and an Ethiopian slave girl, will be staged in front of the 3,000-year-old Temple of Queen Hatshepsut in the Valley of Queens.

"It will combine history, music, culture and spectacle in a way that will appeal to a broad range of people," said Nasser El-Ansari, chairman of the Cairo Opera House. The production, sponsored by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, marks the 125th anniversary of *Aida*'s premiere in Cairo and the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun.

The opera will be presented on six nights, from 12 to 17 October. A 5,000-seat theatre will be constructed for the purpose and later dismantled.

Ansari said that 75 per cent of the tickets for the opening gala performance have been sold "and there are good figures for the other five nights."

He puts this success down to extensive marketing. "We held news conferences in Cairo, Milan, Berlin, Frankfurt, London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Madrid and Vienna," Ansari said. "We invited all opera fans, and arts enthusiasts in general, and invited travel agencies and tour operators to promote the event. As a result, about 700 articles about *Aida* were published in the world's press."

The Cairo Opera House enlisted the assistance of international public relations companies experienced in promoting international opera productions and launched an Internet site in January to provide information about the "most spectacular production ever". Those who visit the site will find all the necessary information on the production, including ticket prices, travel and accommodation, airlines, car rentals and visa requirements.

An impressive cast of international and Egyptian performers is being assembled by the celebrated director Attilio Colonnello. Leading Verdi sopranos Aprile Milo and Wilhelmnia Fernandez will share the title role, while tenors Giuseppe Giaccomini and Walter Fraccaro will play the part of Aida's lover, Radames. The singers will be accompanied by the Cairo Opera orchestra, choir and ballet.

"Everything is going to plan," Ansari said. The stage will be built by a Swiss company in the third week of September, three weeks before the performance. The equipment will arrive in August and rehearsals will begin in early October.

Luxor, the host city, has also begun preparations for the production. "We are ready for the big event," said Mohamed Youssef, head of the city's council. Restoration and expansion work has already been completed at Luxor Airport. "We now have two departure and arrival halls, each seating 2,000 passengers, instead of the original 300 seats. Runways have also been repaved to be able to cope with Concorde, which will carry many people to the event."

"We are going to light the seven-kilometre-long road from Al-Salam Square to the new Luxor bridge, which connects the east and west banks of the Nile, and which must be crossed by the visitors to reach the Valley of Queens," Youssef said. "We are also going to light the eight kilometres of road from the end of the bridge to the Hatshepsut Temple, at a cost of LE3.5 million. This will be of lasting benefit to Luxor because we intend to open the west bank to visitors in the evening during the summer season.

"There will be electricity generators that can be used in case of power failure, and ambulances will be standing by for any emergency," Youssef said. In addition, flowers and trees will be planted everywhere.

With as many as 30,000 visitors expected, the potential problem of a shortage of hotel rooms has been solved by the decision to accommodate some visitors in floating hotels and others in Hurghada and Aswan. "These two cities are relatively close to Luxor and people can return there after attending the performance," Ansari said.

Charter flights to Luxor are being organised to supplement regular flights, said Ashraf El-Tantawi of Emeco Travel.

Despite everything going according to plan, finance remains a cause for concern. "We are allocating LE15 million for the production, which is considered low for such a big event," Ansari said. "We are looking for backers to relieve us of some of the financial burden."

Ticket prices for the opening performance range from $200 to $350. On other nights they start at $150, rising to $300.

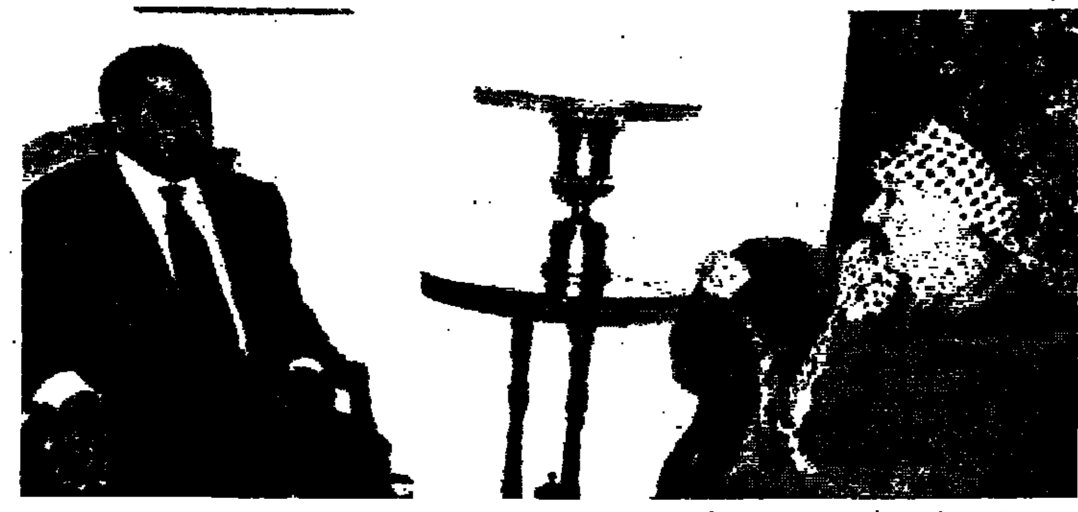
This will be the second production of *Aida* at the site of the Hatshepsut Temple. The first, in November 1994, was a disappointment and the number of performance nights had to be cut from six to three.

One reason was that the weather in November proved to be too cold for an open-air production. This is why this year's production was brought forward to October. Another factor was that those attending the 1994 production did not have a clear view of the temple because the stage and sets had been built in such a way as to obscure vision. The rationale was that the audience would be distracted from the production by the beauty of the temple if it was fully visible.

This year, however, the audience is assured of a good view of the temple, which will be used as the backdrop of the production.

Mubarak warns against undermining Arafat

President Mubarak held extensive consultations with Palestinians and Israelis this week to salvage the peace process from what Foreign Minister Moussa described as the threat of absolute annihilation. **Nevine Khalil** reports





Continuous consultations: Mubarak met with Arafat on Saturday (l); and Levy on Tuesday for extensive talks

President Hosni Mubarak, after meeting Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Saturday and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Tuesday, said the two sides should first address security issues, in the wake of last week's suicide bombings in West Jerusalem. Mubarak strongly objected to Israel's decision to impose a blockade on the Palestinian territories, and warned that such sanctions could result in more violence. The president also said that Arafat's position was critical and the Israeli actions would weaken his position further.

Mubarak, asked whether a solution should take the form of a package deal or issues should be addressed separately, responded in English: "I think we should work on how the security could work, and the Palestinians agreed on cooperation with the Israelis on security measures. Secondly, we should [work] on making the peace process move forward."

Speaking to reporters after meeting with Levy, Mubarak said that Arafat could not be expected to take tough measures against militants when "he is being weakened every now and then by measures [undertaken] by the Israelis." Mubarak described Arafat's position in the peace process as "very, very dangerous. It is very important to keep him in power, and those who don't believe that can wait and see," he said.

Mubarak did not give details of his talks with Levy but only said they discussed "the situation as a whole". In the course of a two-hour meeting, Mubarak expressed concern for the living conditions of Palestinians which sharply deteriorated as a result of the Israeli blockade and briefed Levy on his discussions with Arafat earlier in the week.

Israel sealed off the Palestinian territories following two suicide bombings which killed 15 and injured over 150 in West Jerusalem on 30 July. Israeli troops rounded up dozens of suspected Islamist militants and the Palestinian Authority also carried out its own swoops, arresting members of Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad organisation.

Mubarak drew parallels between the terrorist bombings and the clampdown on the Palestinians, in that they both "punish innocent people". Egypt, he said, condemns terrorism "but we are also against leaving the people to starve and without medicine."

He said the situation was "critical, fragile and dangerous" and a quick solution must be found for lifting the blockade "because the present situation may [result in] much more terrorism, which we fear."

"I asked them to find a quick solution to the present situation," Mubarak said. "We are now trying to create an atmosphere to help the process as a whole in coordination with the US." Mubarak added that Egypt has ideas "which we have not stated yet".

Mubarak said that the best way to solve the current crisis between Israel and the Palestinians is for the two sides to work on "security cooperation, a removal of the obstacles in the peace process and confidence-building." In calling for a removal of these obstacles, Mubarak presumably referred to a freeze on the construction of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem.

Commenting on reports that Israel is using last week's bombings as a pretext for not going back to the negotiating table, Mubarak noted that terrorist acts did not stop Yitzhak Rabin's government from continuing negotiations. He described Rabin's action as "very wise because the only way to avoid terrorism and violence is to go through with the peace process." Mubarak added that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "should be working for a comprehensive peace, but I cannot foretell".

Mubarak objected to Netanyahu's call on Arafat to combat terrorism the way Egypt did, calling the comparison "unfair," but affirmed that the Palestinians are willing to cooperate with Israel to combat terrorism.

Mubarak told Levy that 500 Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza as a result of Israel's closure of the frontier should be allowed through. "The border should be open, the food and medicine should go through," he said. Mubarak added that he met with Levy as foreign minister "who holds the strings," but if agreement is reached on ways of pushing the peace process forward, he is willing to meet with Netanyahu. He said that the US is continuously "put in the picture" until a formula is reached, because they are the "main players there".

Arafat, after meeting with Mubarak on Saturday, urged the US to resume its mediation effort "at this very critical time in order to save the peace process". The Palestinian president had briefed Mubarak on the measures of collective punishment which the Israeli government clamped on the Palestinians. Arafat said Mubarak expressed "displeasure" and promised to work hard to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians.

"We condemned the act [the bombings], but Israel is using this incident to wage war against the Palestinian people and their leaders instead of combating terrorism," Arafat said. He strongly opposed the shutdown of the borders between the Palestinian territories and Egypt and Jordan, the deployment of tanks and armoured vehicles on the outskirts of Palestinian towns and withholding tariff and tax money due to the Palestinian Authority. "These measures are unacceptable and unreasonable and a real blow to the peace process as a whole" which is Netanyahu's aim, according to Arafat. "Netanyahu wants to destroy the peace process," Arafat said, adding that the "only way out is for the Israeli side to realise the importance of the peace process, [but] unfortunately, the first step the Israeli government took was to freeze all contacts with us."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa commented: "There is a lot of tension on both sides, and it is no longer a matter of promises here and there. In this charged and tense atmosphere they [Mubarak and Arafat] met to discuss all angles of the situation."

Moussa, who attended the meeting, said that Arafat "expressed himself strongly," arguing that the responsibility for what happened cannot be placed on the shoulders of the Palestinian Authority or its president because investigations are inconclusive so far. Moussa, who had telephoned Arafat on the eve of Saturday's visit, said that Cairo will continue its consultations, especially with the Palestinians, in order to "save the peace process from the threat of absolute annihilation".

Like Arafat, Moussa urged the US to act quickly through a "balanced initiative to bring the two parties back to the negotiating table". He emphasised that Egypt was not involved in the anticipated US proposal, and praised America's attitude in the peace process, saying that it is "the right prelude for an American initiative".

Amer's death investigated

The official version of Abdel-Hakim Amer's death is that he committed suicide. Now, this is being questioned by members of his family who claim that he was murdered. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** investigates

The family of the late Field Marshal Abdel-Hakim Amer has requested a fresh investigation into the death of Egypt's top military commander who led the armed forces to defeat in the June 1967 war.

The official version is that Amer committed suicide by taking poison in September 1967, after then President Gamal Abdel-Nasser sent officers to arrest him. Amer died while in custody. However, his brother, Hassan Amer, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* he believes there is enough evidence to launch a fresh investigation into what he believes was a "deliberate murder." "What we want is the truth," Hassan Amer said. "And the truth, as we see it, is that he was killed and did not commit suicide." He and other family members believe that Abdel-Hakim Amer was either forced to take the poison or was served a poisoned drink.

Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi has agreed to examine material, including autopsy reports, presented by the family to determine whether there was enough evidence to launch an investigation.

This was not the first time that family members requested an investigation. They first did so in 1975. The government went ahead with the procedure at the time, but the investigation was stopped shortly afterwards. "When we demanded an explanation from the prosecutor-general, the only answer we received was that they were busy with torture cases," Hassan Amer said.

"We are positive that his death was premeditated. Many of the president's men at the time wanted Amer out of the political scene," he added, refusing to discuss Nasser's position. "We cannot point accusing fingers at certain people and claim they killed Abdel-Hakim Amer but we have evidence that certain men wanted to get rid of Amer to preserve the regime and that his murder was planned by one of Nasser's men," Hassan Amer said.

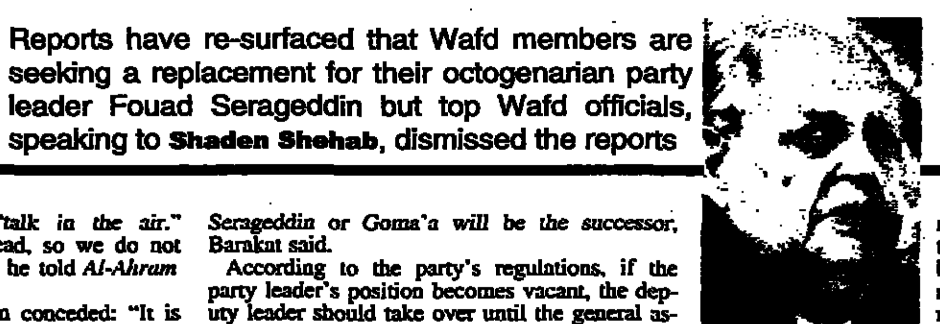
Nasser and Abdel-Hakim Amer first met in 1939 when the two junior army officers were serving at an army camp in Mankabad, a village in the southern governorate of Assiut. This was the start of a life-long friendship. They separated when Nasser was sent to serve in Sudan but their paths crossed again in 1948 when they enrolled for advanced studies at the military academy. Amer was the first officer to be recruited by Nasser to join the underground Free Officers group that overthrew the monarchy in 1952.

Amer was appointed as chief-of-staff of the armed forces in 1953 and was promoted from major to major-general in one stroke. In 1958, he was made vice-president and was known to be the second man after Nasser. He submitted his resignation a few days after the June 1967 defeat and was placed under house arrest for three months, dying in September of the same year.

"If he wanted to commit suicide, as they claim, he would have done that right after the defeat," Mustafa Amer, another brother, said. "It does not stand to reason that three months after the defeat he would decide to take his own life."

No heir yet for the pasha

Reports have re-surfaced that Wafd members are seeking a replacement for their octogenarian party leader Fouad Serageddin but top Wafd officials, speaking to **Shaden Shehab**, dismissed the reports



For more than a year many Wafd Party members and political observers have been expecting the party's leader, Fouad Serageddin, to nominate a successor as the 86-year-old "pasha" is reported to be in poor health.

Reports that members might take the initiative and choose a successor first came in May 1996 when the party's general assembly — which is empowered to elect a new leader if necessary — held one of its rare meetings. The reports recurred last week when an Arabic-language magazine reported that Serageddin cut short a holiday in Alexandria after learning that members of the party's Supreme Committee had met to discuss a replacement.

Two top party officials are said to be competing for the chairman's post: Yassin Serageddin, Fouad Serageddin's brother and leader of the party's parliamentary group, and No'man Goma'a, the party's deputy leader.

Yassin Serageddin dismissed the published reports as "nonsense" and "talk in the air." "Fouad Serageddin is not dead, so we do not need to discuss a successor," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

And yet, Yassin Serageddin conceded: "It is possible that some party members talked about it, but it was nothing formal." He explained that the party's leader is not nominated by the 60-member Supreme Committee but by the 1,200-member Wafdist Authority, which is the party's general assembly. This Authority, which meets every five years, last met in 1996. But, Yassin Serageddin said, it can hold an emergency meeting at the request of the party leader or two thirds of its members.

Omar Barakat, a Wafdist MP, said, "Fouad Serageddin is a man of democracy and no one will be willing to discuss such an issue [a replacement] behind his back. He is loved and respected by all Wafdist members." Even if he retires, there is no reason to assume that Yassin Serageddin or Goma'a will be the successor, Barakat said.

According to the party's regulations, if the party leader's position becomes vacant, the deputy leader should take over until the general assembly meets to elect a successor which it must do within 60 days.

The younger Serageddin and Goma'a have little in common. Goma'a is known for his strong opposition to the government and his good connections with other party members. Yassin Serageddin has the advantage of being one of the party founders and also carrying the family name. However, he is said to have little popularity within the party and is often criticised for allegedly toeing the government's line.

The Wafd Party, a staunch advocate of political and economic liberalism, occupied the centre stage of domestic politics between 1919 and 1952. Supressed, along with other opposition parties, for a quarter of a century by post-1952 revolution governments, the Wafd staged a comeback in 1978 when the nation reverted to the multi-party system.

The late President Anwar El-Sadat seemed to have second thoughts a few months later. He issued a decree prohibiting those who had held high positions before the revolution from political party membership. The decree appeared to target Fouad Serageddin and the party's secretary-general at the time, Ibrahim Farag. In reaction, the Wafd decided to "freeze" its activities.

Serageddin and many prominent figures were jailed by Sadat one month before his assassination in October 1981, but were freed afterwards. Two years later, the Wafd staged another comeback but never regained the wide popularity it enjoyed before 1952.

Research by fax

THE GREATER Cairo Library has opened a new fax information service to allow readers to obtain information without making a personal visit to the library's Zamalek premises, reports Nesmahar Sayed. Anyone can send a fax to the library on 341-2280, requesting information on various subjects. The library will reply within 24 hours, according to its general manager, Mohamed Hamdi.

"The number of library users will increase because people don't have to leave their homes or offices to come to the library," Hamdi said. "They can get the information they need without getting stuck in traffic jams or suffering from the heat."

The library, which was opened in 1995, contains 150,000 books and periodicals. The fax service is being restricted to seven specialised fields for the time being: historical events, Arab and international figures, places and locations, Cairo city, Arab, regional and international organisations and institutions, linguistic terms and the library's activities and services. New fields will be added in the future, and a telephone service is also planned.

Faxes are accepted around the clock. Users who fax from Cairo receive the information they request by fax. Those outside Cairo are sent an answer by mail. "Sometimes, the information is sent in less than half an hour," said the library's assistant manager, Hassan Rashwan.

He said the longest query received by the new service requested information about the Kuwaiti Al-Sabah ruling family from 1800 until 1835 and its connections with Mohamed Ali, the ruler of Egypt at the time. The strangest request asked the library to conduct a feasibility study about raising cattle. The answer was a polite 'no'.

The Greater Cairo Library also plans to begin a new service for researchers, which would involve compiling their names, fields of study and telephone numbers. Library staff would then notify them when new reference books relevant to their field of study were acquired.

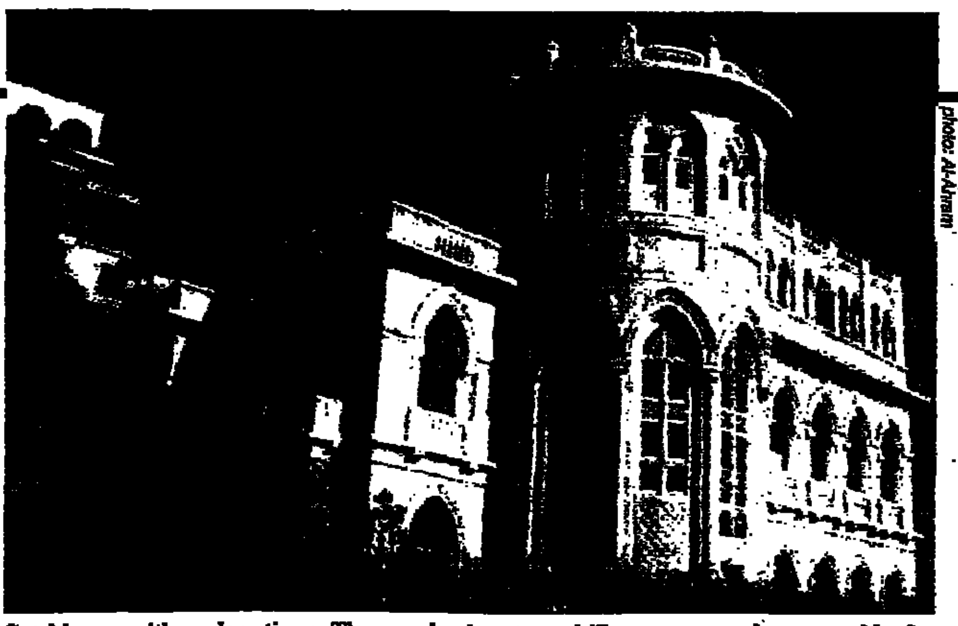


photo: Al-Ahram

Catching up with modern times: The grand palace-turned-library can now be accessed by fax

Working to 'defuse' the crisis

During his visit to Cairo, David Levy and Egyptian leaders agreed on a tentative scenario to defuse the present explosive situation. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy reached agreement with his Egyptian hosts on Tuesday on certain steps to defuse tension and create a healthier climate for discussion between Israelis and Palestinians and the concerned mediators.

The agreement includes an Israeli pledge to ease the pressure on the Palestinians living in the self-rule territories. "Minister Levy promised that he is going to report on [Tuesday's] talks to the Israeli government and that it is going to take immediate measures that will help in easing the current situation as a first step," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told a joint news conference at Cairo Airport before Levy departed for Israel. The agreement also includes a tentative schedule for a series of talks and meetings that include the Egyptians, Palestinians, Israelis, Europeans and Americans. According to this schedule, Moussa will soon visit Israel to press the Egyptian mediation effort.

Referring to Levy's talks with President Hosni Mubarak and himself, Moussa said: "We put all the problems on the table." The talks included "lengthy discussions that covered several points in detail with the obvious purpose of salvaging the peace process," he added.

The Egyptians also briefed Levy on the concerns expressed by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during his visit to Cairo last week. Levy said that he would take what he heard in Cairo back to his government. Both parties will then decide the next step in what is expected to be an intensive campaign to save the peace process.

Asked if the Israelis still think of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a partner in the peace process, Levy replied, "The Palestinian Authority is Israel's partner in the peace process, and it is out of this belief that the PA needs to deal [with us] particularly when tragic incidents occur."

Levy criticised the PA for allowing "the terrorists" the freedom to act as they wish. He said that his government is expecting Arafat to arrest "dozens and dozens" of Palestinian militants whose names are on "a list" that has been compiled by the Israeli side and passed on to the PA. "Israel considers these activists living bombs," said the Israeli foreign minister. He added: "This is a very dangerous business. It is dangerous for the peace process, for Israel and for the Palestinians."

For his part, Moussa affirmed that "Arafat is doing all he can with regard to the security issue," and underlined that at this stage it is crucially important "to avoid taking any measures that could further erode trust between the parties."

While both ministers received each other's statements warmly, they disagreed on how to characterise the measures taken by the Israelis against the Palestinians, which include the closure of the PA territories and the blocking of financial transfers made to the PA through Israeli banks. These actions were described by Moussa as "mass punishment measures".

"I hope they will be stopped, because our main mission now is to improve the environment in order to salvage the peace process, and we need to make a particular effort to improve the level of trust," he said.

The visiting Israeli minister, however, rejected the description of Israeli government actions against the Palestinians in the self-rule territories as "punitive measures."

"We had to take certain measures," he said. "What we are doing now is much less than what we could do." Levy also rejected criticism that the Israeli measures would only serve the enemies of peace and shake the image and status of Arafat. These measures, he said, "do not aim to weaken the position of the Palestinian Authority".

The Israeli minister said he hoped that the measures would encourage the Palestinian Authority to do all it could "to combat terrorism." He had, he said, "a feeling that the [Palestinian] Authority will do this soon so that we can go back to negotiations".

Meanwhile, both officials affirmed their commitment to pursue the cause of peace and exert all possible efforts to this end. "What counts now is for us to work together to save the peace process," Moussa commented.

Recognising the efforts exerted by different parties to put the peace process back on track, Moussa and Levy said that they were hopeful that the forthcoming visit to the region by the US envoy to the Middle East, Dennis Ross, and the visit of Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan to Tel Aviv yesterday would bear fruit.



Egypt-US business council reshuffled

Gamal Hosni Mubarak is the new spokesman for the Egypt-USA Presidents' Council following a reshuffle in which five members were replaced. **Khaled Dawoud** reports



Following months of confusion over the future of the two-year-old Egypt-USA Presidents' Council (EUPC), the Egyptian government has replaced five of its 15 representatives and council members have chosen Gamal Mubarak as their new spokesman. The changes to the business advisory body were announced by EUPC co-chairman Ibrahim Kamel.

The EUPC was formed in April 1995 as one of three principal elements of the Egypt-US economic partnership agreement. It is commissioned to directly inform and advise the president of Egypt and the vice-president of the United States on measures to improve investment and trade between the two countries. Since its establishment, the council has held two meetings chaired by President Hosni Mubarak and Vice-President Al Gore and attended by its 30 Egyptian and American members, all top businessmen. Al Gore was due to visit Egypt in May to attend a third meeting, but the visit was delayed until September. A council member told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the September visit is not confirmed and may not take place.

The confusion over the EUPC's exact role and its influence on both governments came to the surface during President Mubarak's latest visit to Washington in March. At that time, some Egyptian members of the council made public statements criticising the pace of the government's privatisation programme. They said the government should speed up the privatisation of important state-controlled sectors such as telecommunications, banks and oil refineries.

Their statements angered the government, and Information Minister Safwat El-Sharif responded that economic policy was determined by the government and not the EUPC. The controversy triggered reports, which were later denied, that the council might be disbanded.

The five members replaced by the government in last week's shake-up are Louis Bishara, Mohamed Shatta, Ahmed Abul-Wafa, Mamdouh Zahran and Mohamed Ozlab. The new members are Ahmed Bahgat, Abdel Salam El-Anwar, Ahmed Ezz, Hazem Barakat and Rashid Mohamed Rashid.

The Egyptian members held their first meeting on 27 July and agreed to appoint Gamal Mubarak as spokesman.

Ahead of their second meeting on Monday, Mubarak held his first news conference as spokesman to inform a selected group of reporters of the results of the first meeting. He said members had agreed to retain the Council's four main committees on economic policies, new business opportunities, promotion and marketing and human resources. "The reinstatement of these committees reflects the council's work plan for the new term, which focuses on enhancing trade between Egypt and the US, with special attention to increasing Egyptian exports to the US," Gamal Mubarak said. "The council also stressed the importance of encouraging direct US investments in Egypt and recognised the importance of attracting to Egypt investments in the field of high technology."

Mubarak noted that despite the significant progress made by the Egyptian economy since the EUPC's establishment two years ago, a lot remained to be done, particularly in the field of increasing exports and attracting foreign investments. Attracting US investments would be a priority for the council, he said. Bilateral trade relations remained tilted in favour of Washington, he added, and direct American investments were still falling short of what was required to reach the growth rates projected for the Egyptian economy by the year 2000.

"Two challenges still remain: the challenge of increasing Egyptian exports to the outside world, and to the US in particular, and the challenge of promoting direct investments in the Egyptian economy," Mubarak told reporters. He was not, however, worried by the lack of direct investments because Egypt is at the beginning of its economic reform programme. Other countries whose circumstances are similar to those of Egypt usually receive indirect investments first, that is, through the stock market, bonds and shares, he said. Direct investment tends to increase when international companies and investors gain more confidence in the stability of the economy.

As for Egyptian exports, Mubarak said there were two fields with good potential: ready-made clothes and the software industry. "We believe that Egypt has a competitive advantage in those two fields, but, obviously, lots of things need to be worked out [for Egypt] to be able to realise that advantage."

Asked whether the recent controversy over the future of the annual $2.1 billion US aid to Egypt would negatively affect the council's work, Mubarak said that one of the main goals of the council was to go beyond the aid issue and open new opportunities in the fields of trade and investment. "Both the Egyptian and American governments realise that there are many opportunities for improving economic relations which are more important than the aid issue," he said.

Mubarak excluded the possibility that the council's work might be affected by political developments such as the current deadlock in the Middle East peace process. He said that over the past few years, Egypt had managed to develop its economy regardless of political circumstances, and that maintaining this development was one of the main challenges faced by the government. "Today, and despite the tension in the peace process, we find that Egypt's economic image is improving because the government has been following a sound economic policy."

Asked whether the EUPC members would take part in the fourth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November, Mubarak took the same line as the Egyptian government. He said that no final decision had been made yet and the conference was still months away. Several Arab countries have called for a boycott to protest Israel's intransigent policy in Middle East peace-making.

Mubarak repeatedly impressed on reporters the importance of "taking into consideration the special nature and specific position of the council as an advisory body to both governments." He refused to divulge the recommendations which the Egyptian representatives might include in their reports to both the Egyptian and American governments, on the grounds that as an advisory body, "we are not at liberty to discuss issues unless we are authorised by both governments."

Although the news conference was supposed to focus on the economy, reporters could not resist asking Mubarak questions on other topics. He brushed aside a question on the reasons behind his suing of the London-based Saudi daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* for publishing an advertisement, which it later retracted, claiming he had used his father's influence to make business deals. "The case is before the court. It is a legal matter and I am will not discuss it until the case is over."

Asked about his business activities, Mubarak said he had worked as an adviser to a UK-based financial company. "I used to work for the Bank of America from 1983 until 1994, both in Cairo and London. I left in 1994 and joined Med Investments, which is basically a financial advisory and consultancy firm which deals with European-Middle East cooperation. This is what I am doing now."

Pressed on the question of his involvement in other business activities, Mubarak replied: "I do get involved through Med Investments in some financial advisory work, which is what I used to do in the Bank of America before." However, he vehemently denied, in response to another question, that he was involved in any import-export business. "I have been in the banking world since I graduated, I

Clampdown on El-Hussein's all-night tradition

It has been decided that shops and cafés in El-Hussein district, which have previously stayed open all night to cater to foreign tourists and Egyptians alike, must now shut down before the dawn prayers. **Sherine Nasr** reports

The future of the El-Hussein district as an all-night shopping and entertainment centre has been threatened by a ruling that its shops and cafés must close before dawn prayers begin. El-Hussein, in the heart of Fatimid Cairo, is a major attraction for Arab and other tourists. Many come to the area late at night to dine at restaurants or sit in outdoor cafés enjoying the atmosphere and smoking *sheesha* (hookah). The hustle and bustle continues all night, with restaurants, cafés and some souvenir shops staying open for business until 6am.

But around 1am last Thursday, police appeared at the scene, ordering all shops to shut down within an hour and asking the visitors to leave. "It looked as if a curfew had been imposed on the area," said Mohamed Madani, a waiter.

Abdel-Latif Khedr, first under-secretary at the Interior Ministry, denied that tourists had been targeted or that a hose-pipe was used to drive them out. However, witnesses claimed that street lights were dimmed and that the area was sprayed with a hose-pipe, brought in from a nearby garden.

The police swoop appears to have had two targets: to get rid of thugs and beggars, many of whom were rounded up; and to stamp out so-called "negative practices", such as the high level of noise.

But shop owners complained that closing early would ruin their business during the peak season. "For years, business has gone on in this area for almost 24 hours a day, with shops closing down at 6am," said Tarek Arafat, owner of a souvenir shop. He explained that many tourists do not come to the area until midnight.

The shop owners took their grievance to Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui, who formed a committee to study the problem and devise a solution. "The ministry respects whatever decision has been taken to ensure security in tourist areas. I am positive there were good reasons behind this clampdown," commented Hussein Badran, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Tourism, who heads the committee. He added, however, that the "tourist aspect" of the area should not be overlooked and that the ministry was working to try to achieve a solution.

"The ministry and the Cairo governorate are co-ordinating to reach a solution that's in the best interest of all the concerned parties," Badran said.

He acknowledged that all-night opening did have some negative results, such as horrendous traffic jams and noise. "Many bad practices can take place in this atmosphere, such as the sale of drugs," he added.

The Interior Ministry's Khedr cited another "negative image" — scantily-clad tourists sitting in cafés, smoking *sheesha*, while dawn prayers were being performed in the nearby mosque. "This image contrasts sharply with the sanctity of the place," he said.

Cairo Governor Abdel-Rehim Shehata visited the area last Saturday night and offered shop owners a compromise: they should shut down at 3.30am, before the dawn prayers start.

"The governor was very understanding when he saw the large number of tourists visiting the area late at night," said Mohamed El-Zoghbi, a restaurant owner. He expressed the hope that the 3.30am deadline would be extended once all the beggars and thugs had been rounded up. "The police campaign is in the best interest of those who run tourist businesses in the district," he said, "because those arrested could have easily destroyed the good reputation of the area."

But many who work in the district complained that business had dropped dramatically following the police swoop. "The news has spread among tourists and many of them have stopped coming," said waiter Madani.

Souvenir shop owner Arafat believes the clampdown could ruin his summer season. "July and August are the peak months for Arab tourism," he said, adding that Arab tourists don't arrive in the area until around 2am, after the cinemas and theatres shut. "It is ridiculous to ask them to leave so soon after they arrive," he said.

But the Ministry of Tourism's Badran counselled patience. "We are keen to see security and tourism boom equally," he said.



photo: Khaled Guwell

El-Hussein's Fishawi coffee house, where, for years, Egyptians and tourists have wiled the night hours away

Arab tourism booming

Although Lebanon is re-emerging as a strong competitor, Arab tourists are flocking to Egypt this summer in ever increasing numbers. **Rehab Saad** reports



photo: Mustafa El-Senussi

Three thousand Arab tourists have been arriving in Egypt daily this summer

Hotels, airports, restaurants and taxi drivers are geared up to receive Egypt's summer visitors — many of whom are Arabs.

According to airport officials, about 3,000 Arab tourists are arriving in Egypt each day this summer. And a Ministry of Tourism report shows that the number of Arabs who visited Egypt in the first half of 1997 was 14 per cent up on last year's figure.

"The number of Arab tourists in the first half of 1997 was 224,000 compared to 199,000 in the same period last year," the ministry's report said. Moreover, the number of tourist nights spent by Arabs in Egypt was 1.4 million compared to 1.2 million in the same period last year. Saudi Arabians topped the list with 68,659 visitors, followed by Libyans with 67,796 and Palestinians with 63,454.

"About 150,000 Arab tourists came to Egypt in June and July. About 50,000 of them visited in June while 100,000 arrived in July," said Maj. Gen. Emad Abu-Zagla, head of Cairo Airport Passport Control.

As a result of these increasing numbers, two or three additional flights, and sometimes as many as six, are added to Arab destinations every week. Moreover, two weekly charter flights are now operating from Kuwait to Hurghada directly.

"At this time of the year, when the number of trips and passengers soar, we increase the number of passport control officers to facilitate the procedures of entering the country. We also increase the number of police officers who take care of tourists outside the airport terminals," said Maj. Gen. Mohamed Hedaya, airport security chief. He explained that these police officers keep a close watch on taxis and limousine cars to prevent any possible exploitation of the Arab visitors.

The minister of tourism, Mamdouh El-Beltagui, said that everything possible is done to welcome Arab visitors. "The Arab tourist is given priority because he stays longer and spends more than any other foreign national. He should feel that he is welcome and that he is still in his home country. In this respect, we have adopted a lot of procedures to facilitate his entrance into the country and ensure his, and his family's, comfort."

Hotels throughout Egypt are also prepared for the increase in Arab visitors.

"It is summer and we are ready for the booming Arab season," said Nabila Samak, public relations manager of Intercontinental Hotels. Hala Mohamed, sales manager at the Helnan Shepheard, believes that most of the hotels catering to Arab tourists are overbooked as Arabs continue to flock to Egypt. "To attract more visitors, Egypt is holding several summer festivals such as the 'Holiday on Ice' and the 'World on Ice' shows organised by the Opera House as well as the International Festival of the Arab Song organsied annually by the Ministry of Tourism. There are also special Red Sea packages for Arab visitors."

In addition, the Ministry of Tourism and the Egyptian Tourist Authority, in cooperation with a Saudi public relations agency, organises a $1 million publicity campaign in the Arab region each year.

However, Lebanon is proving a strong competitor for the Arab tourist. "Lebanon, after reconstruction, is taking a piece of Egypt's share of the Arab tourist cake," said Hala Mohamed. "It is true that Arabs are still coming to Egypt, but a lot of them are now going to Lebanon. They sometimes go to Beirut to spend the summer vacation and then, on their way back home, they stop in Cairo to do some shopping because they believe it is less expensive than Lebanon," she said.

Most hoteliers agree that Lebanon is re-emerging as a strong competitor to Egypt and that it is struggling to restore its reputation as an exclusive tourist destination for Arabs. Many festivals are being held all year to lure visitors.

"The Lebanese competition is a real fact. Lebanon was well-known to the Arabs before the civil war. Moreover, Lebanon is promoting itself very well through their satellite television channels which are watched by a lot of people, including Gulf Arabs," said Sally Salaheddin, public relations manager of Marriott Hotels.

Another trial, another ceasefire call

Twenty-three militants, including the main suspect in a failed assassination attempt against President Mubarak, are on trial for planning attacks against top officials. **Khaled Dawoud** attended

Topping the list of the 23 Islamist militants on trial by a State Security Court is Mustafa Hamza, who is believed to be in Afghanistan, and who is described by security officials as the military commander of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. Hamza is also assumed to be the mastermind of the abortive attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in June 1995 in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.

Hamza reportedly left Sudan for war-torn Afghanistan following the abortive attempt. He has already been sentenced to death twice in absentia by Egyptian courts for funding and planning attacks against top government officials.

Hamza was one of three Egyptians whom the UN Security Council asked Sudan to extradite to Ethiopia to stand trial there for their involvement in the Mubarak assassination attempt. Sudan's refusal to do so, on the grounds that the three were not on its territory, led the Security Council to impose diplomatic sanctions against Khartoum last year.

In addition to Hamza, three other defendants are standing trial in absentia. Hearings opened on Sunday.

Said Abdel-Hakim, 24, second on the defendants' list after Hamza, told reporters from behind bars that the majority of the defendants were university students who had been held for two to three years. He himself has been in custody since the middle of 1993.

"Every time a court orders my release because no charges have been brought against me, the Interior Ministry issues another order for my continued detention," Abdel-Hakim said.

Under the emergency law in force since the 1981 assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat, the Interior Ministry and its police force are empowered to detain suspects without trial for long periods.

Abdel-Hakim also said the detained militants were denied visits by families or lawyers. As a result, the scene in the courtroom was chaotic, with families trying to exchange a few words with the defendants, whom they had not seen for some time.

Asked whether this group of defendants supported an appeal issued in early July by imprisoned Al-Gama'a leaders to their followers to halt anti-government attacks, Abdel-Hakim said that "all those inside the prison support the appeal of Al-Gama'a and Jihad leaders."

The imprisoned leaders are serving life terms for their involvement in the Sadat assassination plot. The appeal has led to a split within Al-Gama'a ranks, after expatriate leaders issued counter-statements, vowing to continue the fight against the government until Islamic law was strictly enforced and all imprisoned members of the group were released.

But Abdel-Hakim dismissed the rift as simply a "problem of communication. The expatriate leadership knows very well that those in prison are the actual leaders of the group and they have to heed what they say. The problem is that those living abroad fear that the imprisoned leaders issued the appeal under pressure, but should the two groups manage to contact each other, the misunderstanding will be cleared up and the two will issue a united appeal to stop violence."

The defendants are charged with belonging to an illegal organisation bent on overthrowing the government, planning to assassinate top government officials, police officers and foreign tourists, and the possession of arms and explosives. They denied the charges.

Presiding at the trial is Judge Ahmed Salaheddin Badour, who has issued many death sentences against Al-Gama'a militants in previous trials. As a result, he has been targeted for years by members of Al-Gama'a and is kept under tight police protection, including several armed bodyguards.

Before opening hearings, Badour usually summons the defendants in small groups to his office to assure them that they will receive a fair trial. He also likes to exchange jokes with the defendants and their lawyers and ask them questions about Islam, taking the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence.

In Sunday's session, Badour briefly questioned two state security officers who took part in arresting the defendants. The two confirmed that they carried out the arrests but said they did not seize anything from the defendants.

Hearings were adjourned until 1 September to give lawyers time to study the case.

The defendants were the latest group of militants to be put on trial before state security and military courts for alleged involvement in acts of violence. The large number of militants now on trial, analysts believe, reflects the government's determination not to show any sign of leniency toward the armed Islamist groups who have been waging a campaign of violence since 1992.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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The narrowest of tightropes

The immediate political casualty of last week's suicide bombings in Jerusalem is Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

Under unprecedented pressure from the Israeli government, Arafat has in essence been given a choice — either fall in with Israel's demands to go after Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian self-rule areas or Israel will do so itself, destroying whatever remains of the Oslo process.

Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu seems to believe that, by "using the stick", Arafat will bend to his will. Palestinians demand that their leader should resist. Arafat's dilemma is that in trying to satisfy both sides he will end up satisfying neither, especially if there are further suicide bombings as pledged in a leaflet attributed to Hamas issued after last week's attack. As so often in the past, Arafat — and with him the entire Oslo edifice — is walking the narrowest of tightropes.

Arafat's immediate response to the bombings was to vow to confront "the terrorists... as we did in the past". Following a meeting with Egypt's President Mubarak on 2 August, however, the tone changed. "Israel is waging a war against the Palestinian people instead of a war against terror," he charged. The reasons behind this volte-face are the ferocious measures Israel has taken against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Following the bombings, Israel clamped a total siege on the West Bank and Gaza, including the so-called "internal closure" where over a million Palestinians are prohibited from leaving the seven West Bank cities under Palestinian Authority (PA) rule. Israeli army squads have also launched raids on West Bank villages under its control, arresting around 150 Palestinians, mostly on suspicion of belonging to Hamas.

In addition to these measures, however, Israel has imposed a series of direct sanctions on the PA. After a meeting of the inner security cabinet on 30 July, Israel announced it would stop all tax transfers to the PA, freeze all PA assets held in Israeli banks and block all "incitement" on programmes broadcast from the PA's official TV and radio stations.

Israel's defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, also made it known that he would send Israeli undercover officers to Palestinian controlled areas to hunt Hamas and Jihad fugitives if the PA police refused to cooperate. "We will act against our targets everywhere," said Netanyahu on 31 July. Arafat's response was to declare a "state of emergency and austerity" in the PA areas in readiness for a long economic and military siege.

But the PLO leader has not yet launched a full-scale offensive against the Islamist extremists as he did after similar suicide operations last year. PA security personnel have detained several dozen Palestinians in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus and Gaza for their alleged links to Hamas's military arm, Izzedin Al-Qassam, but there have been no raids on Islamist institutions and mosques or arrest sweeps of Hamas's political leaders. Nor, says the PA's Gaza chief of preventive Security, Mohamed Dahlan, will there be.

Cooperation with Israel's military forces is limited to "clarifying the circumstances of the last terrorist act and who stands behind it," Dahlan told a press conference in Gaza. But there will be no return to full cooperation "until Israel understands the limits of its power, control and right to impose orders". As for Israel's threat to re-enter the self-rule areas, Dahlan was succinct. "The Palestinian people waved goodbye to the Israeli army with olive branches. They won't welcome them back with olive branches," he said.

There are two reasons behind the restraint, say sources. The PA — including Arafat — is unconvinced that the bombers came from the self-rule areas or even from the West Bank and Gaza. One week after the explosions, neither Israel nor the PA has uncovered the bombers' identities, despite raids and "security and intelligence cooperation" throughout the Occupied Territories.

This uncertainty has been reinforced by Hamas's confused responses to the bombings. While some Hamas political leaders (such as Aziz Rantisi in Gaza) have cast doubt on Hamas's claim to the attacks, others (such as Ismail Abu Shanab) have implied that Izzedin Al-Qassam was behind the action but that it was carried out without covenant from the movement's political leadership inside the Occupied Territories. This is another way of saying that authority came from Hamas's "outside" leadership, presumably in Jordan, which has historically advocated armed actions (including suicide operations) against Israel.

The second reason is Arafat's vulnerable standing in Palestinian opinion. The day before the suicide bombings, a special committee set up by the elected Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) submitted its report on the PA's alleged misuse of $326 million of public funds. The committee concluded that corruption was endemic across the PA's 22 ministries and recommended that Arafat dissolve his existing executive, replacing it with a new one made up of "technocrats and professionals" by the time the PLC reassembles in September. It also recommended that criminal charges for corruption be brought against two PA ministers (including current senior PLO negotiator and planning minister, Nabil Shaath) and investigations be initiated against another. Three days later, 16 of the PA's current 18 ministers tendered their resignations in light of the report.

Arafat has already made it known that he won't accept the resignations, "at least not now". But, sources say, he also understands that some reshuffle will be necessary if public confidence is to be restored to the Palestinian leadership, especially among the ranks of his Fatah movement, many of whom have been trenchant in their criticisms of PA ministers both as a government and as negotiators.

In such circumstances, a wholesale crackdown on Hamas and Jihad under Israel's orders would not only strengthen the Islamists in Palestinian opinion, but it could also irrevocably damage the already frail political constituencies on which Arafat has based his leadership and orchestrated support for the Oslo process. For Palestinian (and some Israeli) commentators, Arafat currently has two lifelines. One is to deepen his diplomatic relations with the Arab world, especially Egypt and Jordan. The second is to pray that US special envoy Dennis Ross brings with him something other than Israel's security agenda when he arrives in the region today.



Palestinians lower the wrapped body of Issa Misef into his grave while displaying a Palestinian flag. Palestinians claim Misef was shot from a passing car which had Israeli license plates *(photo: Reuters)*

Assad sees no peace with Netanyahu

As hopes fade for a Syrian-Israeli settlement over the Golan, President Hafez Al-Assad looks increasingly like a man weighing his options, reports Rasha Saad

During a surprise visit to Iran last week, President Hafez Al-Assad called for Jihad "to face the Israeli aggression and to free the Arab occupied land." Al-Assad has ample reason to resent the current Israeli government's attitude to the peace process, but the fact that he chose Iran as a venue to voice his frustration is deemed highly significant by observers. Iran, as well as Syria, have been accused of sponsoring so-called "terrorist" groups opposed to the peace process and any show of solidarity between them can only be interpreted as a strong message to both Israel and the US.

Since Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu took office 14 months ago, the peace process has been pushed aside, revised, and arguably rolled backwards. The Syrians have been weighing their options. Assad's comments, on his first visit to Tehran in seven years, came shortly after Israel's Knesset approved a new law making it more difficult for any Israeli government to withdraw from Syria's occupied Golan Heights.

The Knesset voted two weeks ago in favour of a bill stating that "the existing law concerning the Golan cannot be modified without a special majority of 80 deputies", referring to a December 1991 law extending Israeli civil law on to the Golan. Normally, the Knesset (120 seats) requires a simple majority of 61 deputies to enact laws. In a country with a near 50-50 division between the right and the left, getting 80 deputies to vote for such a monumental move as returning the Golan could be nearly impossible.

The approval of the new amendment in its first reading came amid Israel's celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the occupation of the Golan. Netanyahu originally supported the bill, but later said he would seek to reduce the required majority to 61 in the second and third readings of the bill.

Netanyahu's change of tack, an apparent response to worldwide pressure and strong Labour-led opposition at home, seemed only tactical. The Israeli prime minister did not change his stand or his tone concerning the Golan. In recent speeches, he sounded as disinclined as ever to part with the strategic plateau "The destiny of this land cannot be disassociated from that of Israel," he said.

The Knesset's bill and Netanyahu's statements brought to the surface again the deep gulf dividing Israel and Syria over the peace talks. Syria insists that any talks with Israel should pick up where previous negotiations with the former Israeli Labour government left off. Syrian officials maintain that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed to the principle of withdrawal from the Golan and say that the Americans are witness to a verbal commitment to that effect.

Since coming to power, Netanyahu argued that no such agreements exist and called upon the Syrians to return to the negotiating table without any preconditions. Arab countries supported Syria in its stand, saying that negotiations were conducted with the government of Israel and not with Rabin or former Israeli Premier Shimon Peres personally. Thus, negotiations cannot go back to square one.

The United States has so far ignored Syria's claim that the former Israeli government agreed to withdraw from the Golan and has urged Damascus to return unconditionally to the negotiating table. The US Congress recently called for trade sanctions against Syria for its alleged sponsorship of terrorism. The White House voiced opposition to the move, but President Bill Clinton's administration and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright maintain a "hands-off" policy in the current Syrian-Israeli deadlock. Assad's visit to Iran last week was perceived as an indirect message to Israel and the United States that Damascus still has other options.

In his joint press conference with President Hosni Mubarak in Damascus last week, Al-Assad said that he could see no hope for peace in the Middle East so long as the Likud government was in office. In a recent speech, the Syrian president said, "We called for peace. But Israel, under its current government, responded by supporting extremism and fanaticism and reneging on all that had been achieved during the peace process."

Ahmed Fakhr, head of the Cairo-based Middle East Research Centre, believes that the Syrians are ready for peace but feel that all the doors have been closed in their faces. Israel, reluctant to make concessions, is toughening its stand in the hope that Damascus would abandon the peace process and take the international blame for the deadlock, he said.

According to Tikva Honig-Parnass, of the Jerusalem-based Alternative Information Centre, the proposed Golan legislation is "an aggressive and provocative step." The bill, she says, reflects "typical Israeli arrogance which assumes that the occupation of the Golan Heights is just and right."

Israel purposely exaggerated the prospects of war with Syria, Honig-Parnass argues. "For months, the Israeli government has been making declarations about the possibility of such a war, trying to inflame domestic and American public opinion with horror stories about chemical weapons produced in Syria."

Israel's chief of the general staff, Amnon Shahak, last week told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense committee that Damascus is possibly preparing for war and alleged a rise in Syrian military purchases.

As Syrian-Israeli talks remain deadlocked, most Arab and Western diplomats agree that the most immediate task is not to start the negotiations but to avoid a possible war between the two countries.

Safe in Lebanon

Lebanese officials hailed the US decision to lift the travel ban against their country as a vote of confidence that Lebanon is on the right track towards restoring its old fame, reports Zeina Khodr

Years of efforts by the Lebanese government, Arab pressure groups and some American legislators to convince Washington that Lebanon now is a safe country finally bore fruit last week when the 12-year US travel ban on that country was lifted.

The ban, however, was replaced with strongly worded travel advice to Americans, reminding them that they might be running a risk by going there.

The decision by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to lift the ban was welcomed by Lebanese officials. "It is a vote of confidence in the country and a certificate for the progress achieved," Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri said minutes after he was informed of the decision.

But Albright made it clear that she still believed Lebanon was a "dangerous place" and urged Americans not to travel there, an assessment not shared by Lebanon.

"I do not agree with Albright but I respect her opinion," Al-Hariri said. "The Americans will soon realise this is not true. Everyone — whether Lebanese, American or any other nationality — is safe in this country. I am proud to say security here is much better than in other countries."

Many believed the ban was outdated and unjustifiable in light of the improved security situation. Even the longest held hostage by Hizbollah radicals, the American Terry Anderson who was released in 1991, came back to Beirut last year in a bid to persuade his government to lift the travel ban.

Hizbollah, the group accused by the United States of hostage-taking and terrorism, said the decision to lift the travel ban came after Washington realised that its policy towards Lebanon had failed. "Washington realised the ban had no meaning. Many American passport holders were visiting Lebanon. Last year alone 40,000 came and they were not harmed. The US realised it was losing out on investment opportunities and that is why it took the decision," Hizbollah's Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naem Kassem said.

Many American businesses are interested in participating in Lebanon's multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan. "The ban was an impediment. A psychological barrier is now lifted. It will encourage the large American-Lebanese community who previously hesitated to come and invest," Al-Hariri said. "To us, the decision was a moral one. We do not like to see anyone barred from travelling here. Since 1992 the country has been on the road to recovery. International companies have returned and foreign investment is pouring in."



Zeinab Badran cries in Nabatiyeh, at the funeral Taissir Badran, one of five Hizbollah guerrillas killed by an Israeli bomb *(photo: Reuters)*

In the 1980s, at the height of the Lebanese civil war, Americans and other Westerners were taken hostage. The US Embassy and a marine compound were bombed in 1983. And guerrillas hijacked a TWA flight to Beirut in 1985, killing an American passenger on board. It was these incidents that led Washington to impose the travel ban in an attempt to lessen the risk against Americans and protect US national security interests.

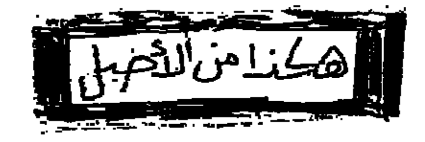
Al-Hariri denied reports that the US made its decision to lift the travel ban conditional on a pledge by the Lebanese government to curb Hizbollah activities in south Lebanon. "There is an international agreement that sanctions resistance activities against Israel's occupation in the south. Resistance will not stop until the occupation ends," the prime minister clarified.

Many observers believe that the arrest and sentencing last week of five Japanese Red Army members in Beirut was part of Al-Hariri's government efforts to erase Lebanon's image as a refuge for international fugitives. The five Japanese, considered as "terrorists" by their government, were sentenced by a Lebanese court to three years in prison for illegally entering and residing in Lebanon more than 10 years ago.

The trial caused an outcry in Lebanon where many regard the five Japanese as heroes, not terrorists, for their support of the Arab cause against Israel. The main defendant in the case, Kozo Okamoto, was the only survivor of a commando operation at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv in 1972 in which several Israelis were killed. But the five did not face charges for their involvement in the Red Army. Japan's government wants the five Red Army members to face trial in Tokyo for alleged attacks they carried out in Europe, Asia and the Middle East in the 1970s. Lebanon said that any extradition request would only be considered after they serve their terms in prison. Lebanon and Japan do not have an extradition treaty.

Despite the initial confusion following their detention, the Japanese ambassador to Lebanon Yasuji Ishigaki said he was pleased with the way the judiciary handled the case. But he also gave a thinly veiled warning to the Lebanese government, saying the guerrillas' eventual handover was important to Japan. "Our position is clear. Japan expects them transferred to Tokyo once they complete their sentences," Ishigaki told the *Weekly*. "And I have no doubt the authorities will respond to our request. They will extradite them due to the serious crimes they committed. Lebanon is aware of its important relations with Tokyo. It will be in Lebanon's interest to hand them back."

Under Lebanese law, all foreigners convicted of a crime have to be deported to their country. It is still not clear whether the five will be deported to Japan or granted political asylum.



Seven years of torment

On the seventh anniversary of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, **Hussein Al-Qassimi** examines why the likelihood of the UN sanctions against Baghdad being lifted remain slim

Seven years ago, shortly after midnight on 2 August, Iraq's Republican Guard, supported by tanks and jet fighters, stormed into Kuwait. Hours later, the ruling Revolutionary Command Council led by President Saddam Hussein announced that the massive Iraqi strike at its tiny southern neighbour was in response to a request by some Kuwaiti army officers who had overthrown their government and were asking for help from Iraq.

Last Saturday, Iraq marked the anniversary of the invasion, dubbed by the official media as "*Yom Al-Nida' Al-Azeem*," or the "Day of the Great Call" in reference to the alleged request for help from the Kuwaiti army officers. Baghdad newspapers again lambasted the Kuwaiti government and accused it of unleashing "a US-Zionist" conspiracy against Iraq by flooding the oil market with crude in order to force prices down to reduce Iraq's revenues at a time when it needed to recover from war with Iran. Iraq's decision to invade Kuwait was to teach "the traitors" a lesson, trumpeted the Baghdad state-owned newspapers.

To the Iraqis entering their eighth year of precarious living conditions because of UN economic sanctions clamped on their country, the story was too well remembered. Their key concern is not the past but the future and specifically whether the seventh anniversary of the invasion will bring hope for an end to their predicament.

Will it? Probably not. The main reason is that the sanctions will not be lifted until the UN certifies that Iraq is no longer a threat to its neighbours. Despite the warm welcome the new UN chief weapons' inspector Richard Butler received in Baghdad last month and the statements of goodwill made by both sides thereafter, observers remain sceptical that the weapons files will be closed any time soon. If past experience is any indication, then statements of goodwill alone do not reflect the true nature of the relations between Iraq and UNISCOM, the commission in charge of destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Moreover, there is increasing evidence that the United States, as the sole world superpower, is more determined than ever to keep the sanctions in place as long as President Saddam Hussein is in power. Such a situation makes the embargo an instrument in a struggle which even optimists doubt will end in a compromise.

Only a few days before the anniversary of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, top American officials, including President Clinton's Chief National Security Adviser Sandy Burger, received Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani and reiterated to him that "only a change in Iraq's government can lead to a change in the US policy." This can hardly be good news for the 22 million Iraqis awaiting a quick lifting of the sanctions.

Elsewhere, little has changed despite intermittent outcries that the UN sanctions are exacting a heavy toll on the Iraqi population. Iraq's expectation that some of the permanent members of the Security Council will veto a renewal of the sanctions is proving groundless.

Take China, a staunch supporter of the lifting of the sanctions, as an example. Only a few weeks ago, Iraq signed a lucrative oil deal with Beijing in the hopes that it would vote for a lifting of the sanctions when the time comes. It never did and last week news reports suggested that Kuwait is considering the purchase of 72 long-range howitzers from China to prevent Iraq from doing so. *The New York Times* quoted a senior Kuwaiti official as saying that his country wants the $300 million deal "to please the Chinese and not upset them in the Security Council" ahead of its next review of the sanctions in October. It is a bitter reminder that the lifting of the sanctions is not a priority even for those who can be lured by billions of dollars worth of business with the Iraqis.

Additionally, the steady efforts Iraq has made to rejoin the Arab fold have been for naught. After nearly four months of flirtation by Baghdad, Damascus turned down all Iraqi requests to resume diplomatic and political ties after trade relations were restored. A thaw in relations with Lebanon suffered a setback last month when the Lebanese government refused to let Iraqi athletes take part in the Arab Games. Both the Syrian and Lebanese moves seemed influenced by strong opposition from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who still keep a watchful eye on Iraq's efforts to return to Arab ranks. The attitude of governments intent on punishing the Iraqi regime for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait will make the chances of an early lifting of the sanctions slim, if not nil.

Meanwhile, Baghdad's official media maintained that changes in Iraq's policies should not be expected. It boasted of Iraq's great victory over "America and its cronies" and editorials and commentaries exhibited the usual, vitriolic rhetoric against what they termed "the traitors to the Arab nation."

For analysts, these statements can hardly be considered conducive to Iraq bettering its relations with the Arab countries which lead the efforts to maintain the UN sanctions. The bottom line, however, is that Iraq's relationship with the rest of the world is certain to remain rocky so long as the sanctions remain in place.



Mohamed Khatami (r) is confirmed as Iran's fifth president since the Islamic revolution by paramount leader and spiritual guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (c). Outgoing President Rafsanjani (l) is expected to keep a key role in the regime (photo: AFP)

Enter the Islamic revolution's Gorby?

Americans hope that newly elected Iranian President Mohamed Khatami will turn into an "Ayatollah Gorby". **Safa Haeri** analyses the obstacles in his way

The swearing-in of the Ayatollah Mohamed Ali Khatami as the seventh president of Iran opens a new chapter in the 18-year life of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the same way as the Iranians used to refer to events as taking place before or after the revolution of 1979, now there will be a before and after 23 May 1997, the day Khatami was elected.

The 54-year-old Khatami won a surprising 20 million votes against seven million for his main rival, the Ayatollah Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the conservative speaker of the Majlis (parliament). Because of the firm support Nateq-Nuri enjoyed from the clerical orthodox establishment, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the all-powerful "Guide" of the Islamic revolution and the regime's strongman, it was assumed by everyone that Nateq-Nuri would be the next president.

Asked what would have been the outcome of the elections if Khatami had been the candidate favoured by Ayatollah Khamenei as opposed to Nateq-Nuri, all Iranian and foreign correspondents and analysts who covered the elections said that Nateq-Nuri would have "very probably" won.

That is why the victory of Khatami, a relatively unknown mullah not associated with the ruling establishment, was seen and interpreted unanimously by Iranian and foreign analysts as a "stunning slap" in the face of the Ayatollah Khamenei. The election result was seen as a "protest vote" against the present Islamic system based on the concept of the *Velayat-i Faqih*. According to this concept, people are minors who need to be "guided" by clerics who present themselves as the representatives of God and the Prophet Mohamed.

What surprised everyone, but most particularly the rulers themselves, was that the great majority of the 20 million who voted for Khatami were youngsters of both sexes, the very "children" of the revolution. Clerical rulers thought that 18 years of constant, unabated, one-sided propaganda had turned those young men and women into a docile, obedient generation totally dedicated to the regime and its leaders. But their expectations failed.

Another significant particularity of the elections was that most of Khatami's supporters came from the middle and poor classes. It is interesting to note that 90 per cent of the families of the Pasdaran, the regime's Praetorian Guard, also voted for Khatami even though their leaders and high-ranking commanders spoke in support of Nateq-Nuri.

The election of Khatami, a former minister of Islamic Guidance who had the courage to resign from his job to protest pressures put on him by hardline mullahs because of his leniency towards intellectuals, immediately generated a great deal of expectations both inside and outside Iran. Some foreign analysts, particularly in Washington, see in him an "Ayatollah Gorby", referring to the Soviet Union's reform-minded leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Others, mostly in France, labelled him a "reformist".

But given the very system of the Islamic regime, almost all Iranian experts warn against such "wishful thinking". "In Iran, the president has very little powers, less than those the prime minister used to have under the Shah," said Iranian dissident Ayatollah Mehdi Haeri Khorshidi, a former classmate of Khatami who now lives in exile in Germany. "Just think of a president who does not have the right to have advisers for military, security and intelligence affairs. Think of a regime in which the [spiritual] leader has his own representatives everywhere, from the smallest cemetery and factory in the remotest village to the highest offices, including that of the president. Those 'representatives' are always more important than the officials," Khorshidi explained.

The obstacles Khatami will face in implementing his campaign promises — the rule of law, justice for all and fighting against corruption and poverty — are many. All stem from the fact that not only does the Ayatollah Khamenei enjoy "divine" powers, but, more practically, he directly controls all key ministries and top posts. These include the Information, Intelligence and Security Ministry, the equivalent of the former Soviet intelligence body, the KGB. The radio and television services, the armed forces, the notorious Islamic Revolutionary Court and the Clergymen Special Tribunal are all under the control of this leader.

Khamenei's dominance extends to other revolutionary organisations, including the 15th of Khordad, the organisation that offered $2.5 million to anyone who kills Salman Rushdie, the author of the controversial *Satanic Verses* for which the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini condemned the writer to death.

To implement the rule of law, President Khatami needs to dismantle numerous vigilante and "Islamic" groups such as the Hizbollah, the Ansar Hizbollah, the Jondollah, the Sisters of Zeynab, the *Hijab* Enforcement Patrol and others. All these groups limit to the strict minimum the freedoms of ordinary Iranians. Such groups get their orders directly from the leader and their zeal stems from their hunger for money, not their love of law.

Like domestic and key economic decisions, the foreign policy of the country is also under Khamenei's control. For example, when the EU decided last June to send its ambassadors back to Tehran, Khamenei unilaterally decided to bar the German ambassador from returning without consulting with the president or the foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati. This led the EU to side with Germany and reverse its decision to send back ambassadors to Iran.

Khatami, in his inaugural speech as president on Monday, offered to "shake hands" with all nations committed to peace and security and the principle of mutual respect and common interests. Nevertheless, one should not, at least at this stage, expect any major changes in Iranian foreign policy, including its support for militant Islamist groups in the Middle East.

In the same speech, the new president pledged to carry out his campaign promises of applying the rule of justice and law, guaranteeing the participation of the people in the running of their affairs, and the creation of a serene and secure atmosphere. "Law must become a principle; criticism must be accepted; justice must prevail. To implement these pillars of Islam one needs wisdom and intelligence and the experience of experts, researchers, the learned ones," Khatami pointed out to the dismay of many clerics opposed to any form of modernism.

"Those who voted for Khatami did not have in mind foreign policy or major economic changes. Nor did they think of Western democracy and freedoms," said one Tehran-based Iranian journalist. "What they essentially want is just a little bit of breathing space. They also want the application of laws, even though they are bad and very restrictive. They want the dismantling of all these vigilante patrols, a small field for political and cultural expression to meet the most urgent needs of the young Iranians," he explained.

No matter how this new chapter in the history of the Islamic Republic starts, there is no doubt that its end will be bad for the present clerical "monopolists". If these clerics let Khatami go his way, then people will ask for more freedoms. If they do not, then they will come to an immediate face-to-face confrontation with those who voted for Khatami, a population which is not afraid of them or their tools of repression.

GIA's deadly message

In a series of savage raids, suspected members of Algeria's Armed Islamic Group killed at least 250 civilians over the past 10 days, sending a clear message to the government that they will not stop the violence. **Sherine Bahaa** reports

According to Algerian newspapers, on Tuesday suspected Armed Islamic Group (GIA) members killed between 75 and 110 civilians, cutting the throats of children and abducting screaming young girls.

The attacks were carried out in two provinces just hours after Algerian President Liamine Zeroual vowed on Sunday that rebels, who have killed more than 1,000 people in two months, would be implacably hunted down for crimes which he said "defy human understanding".

Just before midnight on Sunday, rebels attacked two family homes in the village of Amroussa in the Blida province, some 50km south of the Algerian capital, *Le Matin* newspaper reported. "Nineteen members of the Zemim family, including a three-month-old baby, were decapitated with axes. Two young girls, members of the same family, miraculously escaped the massacre. The first was wounded, while the second, who had been kidnapped with her three sisters, was able to flee her abductors," the paper said. It further stated that one of the young girls dragged away was found the next day, her throat slit. "Seven other victims came from the Hachou family whose house is 20 metres from the Zemim home."

According to *Al-Watan* newspaper, well informed on security issues, the attackers had split into two groups, one keeping the local communal guard neutralised at his station while the others carried out the killings.

"At no time did the screams of the women and children make the assassins hesitate. They burst into laughter each time a neck was slit," *Al-Watan* reported, quoting witnesses. It added that among the dead were eight children aged between 40 days and eight years. "One baby, aged two months, was pulled from the arms of its mother who begged the terrorists to kill her before killing her child. The baby was decapitated, then burnt before the eyes of its parents," the paper said. One attacker told three young girls: "You will serve the *emir* [leader]. He is waiting for you." Despite their cries and efforts to escape, they were abducted.

Al-Watan also reported that about 40 more people were assassinated in two mountain villages at the weekend in Ain Defla province. *Le Matin*, however, put the toll in Ain Defla at 76, stating that the killings took place during the night between Sunday and Monday in the villages of Oued El-Ilad, Sidi M'hjand, Ameziane and Erradjm. Eight more people died and seven were wounded at a fake road-block at Hammam Melouane, in Blida province, *Le Matin* added.

The latest killings bring to at least 250 the toll among civilians in the past 10 days and bring to 1,000 the number of people reported killed since 5 June, when Algeria held general elections which officials hoped would mark the beginning of the end of the nearly six-year conflict.

About 60,000 people have been killed since violence erupted when the army cancelled a general election in January 1992, which the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was about to win.

Algeria is preparing to hold local elections on 23 October which Zeroual hopes will make the country "enter the final phase of re-establishing its institutional stability." Until Zeroual's remarks on Sunday, the authorities had not commented publicly on the surge in violence which the president described as a "phenomenon that has cruelly plunged the Algerian family into mourning."

"Abject and barbarous crime, like that which takes place on the eve of each determining event in the nation's future, has again shown itself in acts which defy human understanding and challenge the sacred character of human life," the Algerian president said.

According to observers, the latest series of killings were seen as a direct message to the government that the recent release of FIS leader Abbassi Madani will not bring an end to the violence rocking the country. The FIS has officially condemned the recent killings, saying that they were a clear and direct attempt to block efforts at political reconciliation in Algeria.

Refah takes to the streets

Tension is expected to mount in Turkey as the Islamists take to the streets to protest a new bill supported by the secular government aimed at curbing religious education, reports **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

The dispute between Islamists and secularists in Turkey took yet another turn for the worst this week as Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's government insisted on pushing ahead for parliamentary approval of a bill that will practically end Islamic religious education in Turkey.

The move to implement a lengthened mandatory education programme that would eliminate religious schools sparked anger among Islamists and prompted them to take to the streets in a series of protest demonstrations in various Turkish cities. In Ankara, about 5,000 protesters backed by the Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party blocked the city centre for hours chanting slogans against the government. President Suleyman Demirel, who gave his backing to the changes, and even against the Turkish army. Several protesters were injured and dozens arrested following clashes with the police.

The protests, however, hardly moved Yilmaz's government. Yilmaz himself told reporters in the wake of the protests that he was determined to implement the eight-year compulsory primary education system. "Those who think they can intimidate the government through illegal activities are completely mistaken. The government is firm on putting the continuous education system into practice," Yilmaz said.

But as the bill is expected to be submitted for a parliamentary vote next Saturday, pressure is mounting on the government to introduce mild changes that would not make the new law offensive to the conservative masses of Anatolia.

Under the current system, compulsory primary education lasts five years after which students have the choice of either joining the secular secondary school system or the religious Imam-Hatip secondary sections. If the new system is to be implemented, compulsory education will be extended to eight years, thus bypassing the secondary schools and preventing parents from sending their children to religious schools. This would effectively mean closing down the secondary school sections of Imam-Hatip schools.

According to Turkish media reports, a host of independent Islamist organisations are preparing a nationwide protest campaign for next week. An announcement issued on Sunday by Ensar Foundation, acting on behalf of all Islamic organisations involved in the protest, stated that the demonstration will culminate in a mass rally in Ankara's Tandogan Square on 9 August. The organisers of the campaign denied that they were "rehearsing a *Shari'a* [Islamic law] takeover" as claimed by the Turkish army establishment. Instead, they say they are using their democratic right to express their displeasure over what they consider "an undemocratic bill which aims to impose the will of a certain group on the majority of the population."

Dogu Ergil, history professor at Ankara University, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the military hawks have always considered the Imam-Hatip schools as training schools for Refah militants, as young students are influenced by "overbearing religious impositions". "The secularists regard these Imam-Hatip schools as a place to brainwash the young and turn them into potential fundamentalists to serve in the ranks of the Refah Party. Therefore, the military wants to cut off the supply routes for Refah," Ergil said.

According to Oguzhan Asilturk, deputy chairman of the Refah Party headed by former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, his party does not object to the increase in the length of secondary education per se. But he criticised the fact that the aim of the government is to forcefully obstruct religious education. "Children who want to learn their religion are told they cannot any longer. This is a shameful and ugly arbitrary practice," Asilturk told reporters on Sunday.

According to Refah Party sources, the number of children who enroll in religious education schools is the equivalent of eight per cent of the total student population in Turkey. Thus, claims by secularists that such schools pose a threat to Turkey's secular system are baseless. The Refah Party feels that the recent bill, which was originally requested by the army when Erbakan was in power, is a prelude to what they see as the government's "restrictive policy towards the Islamists".

Refah sources added that the recent bill and other changes the Yilmaz government plans to introduce in the future are reminiscent of Kamal Ataturk's heavy-handed methods in establishing a modern Turkish state. Ataturk banned prayer in the army, closed down mosques and turned them into museums and changed the written Turkish language from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet.

Observers believe that the attitude of the deputies of the conservative Motherland Party headed by Erbakan's former ally, Tansu Ciller, will determine the fate of the educational reform bill. Ciller's parliamentary group may force Yilmaz to make amendments in the reform package — much to the dislike of the left-wing partners in Yilmaz's coalition government — in order not to lose the Motherland Party's Islamist supporters.

A tear-drop on the Indian Ocean

The island-nation of Sri Lanka is a lush but tormented land, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**

On the world map the diamond-shaped island occupies a memorable space. A mere 29 miles off the southeastern coast of India, Sri Lanka lies like a pearl on the Indian Ocean. "You might also see it as a tear-drop," my host, a young literature professor, says ironically. The climate, tropical the year round, encourages ease. An air of indolence prevails even among the high rises and bustling streets of Colombo, the capital city. It is a lush country. Deep green plants grow leafy in the smallest of open spaces; creepers climb up the very distinctive architecture of Sri Lankan homes. The island's 18 million inhabitants must be among the world's gentlest peoples. Make a request, ask for a favour, and your interlocutor's head shall move like a classical Indian dancer's — right to left, left to right. Invariably the ubiquitous Sri Lankan smile shall remove potential misunderstanding: this is a gesture of compliance. During a week-long visit I did not witness a single scuffle, not even a lone altercation.

If standard indicators are taken into account, Sri Lanka appears poised for economic take off. Its population is 85 per cent literate. Women are not behind walls and veils, and make up with men a nearly equal part of the work force. The infrastructure is adequate and well maintained. In seven days I witnessed no power failure nor leas shedding. City transportation is inadequate. The lines at Colombo bus stops were long, and private cars clogged the streets. The welfare system — unique in South Asia — has declined from government cut backs. Its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, at mid-point on the oceanic east-west highway, gave Sri Lanka meaningful and millennial exposures to world civilisations, and today renders it an attractive platform for world trade. At around 6.5 per cent annually, economic growth has been respectable in the last decade but has not matched Sri Lanka's high promise. "The Tamil Tigers have prevented us from becoming an Asian tiger," remarked a young journalist.

For a decade and half this gentle country has been at war with itself, a multi-dimensional war of ethnicity and class, north and south, and state and society. An estimated 100,000 people have been killed. Thousands, perhaps 50,000 persons have "disappeared". I say perhaps because three government appointed commissions have not yet revealed any figures. Torture and other human rights violations have occurred on a large enough scale for Sri Lanka to have kept for a decade a place on Amnesty International's list of top violators. The conflict is in the north and eastern regions, between the Sinhalese dominated government and its armed Tamil adversary, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). While life in Colombo and the thickly populated western and southern areas of the country appears surprising normal, the two adversaries remain locked in a deadly war of attrition. To this visitor, Sri Lanka's contrasting realities presented a paradigm of the pathologies of nationalist ideologies and post-colonial power.

Commonly, the civil war's roots are identified in the ethnic diversity of Sri Lanka. According to the 1981 census the Sinhalese, of whom 90 per cent are Buddhist, constitute 74 per cent of the total population. Tamils, who are Hindus and have inhabited the island since before the Christian era, are 12.6 per cent. Muslims are 7.1 per cent. Others such as the Burghers and Malays make up a mere 0.7 per cent. There is an additional population of Tamil immigrants, some 5.6 per cent, who came from India to work in the tea plantations and are not politically engaged. No census has been held since 1981; such delays are common, and usually do no good, in ethnically diverse third countries.

The effects of this demographic diversity are accentuated by uneven geographical and economic distribution. At 95.3 per cent of the population, Tamils are concentrated in the northern Jaffna peninsula. They also have significant presence in the eastern region: 33.8 per cent in Trincomali district; 70.8 per cent in Batticaloa; and 20.1 per cent in Amparai. Predictably, the Jaffna peninsula, Trincomali and Batticaloa are primary sites of insurgency and counter-insurgency.

The Muslims, also known in Sri Lanka as Moors, are spread out with some concentration in the eastern districts. They question the claims of Tamil separatism in that region; as such their relations with the LTTE tends to be adversarial. During my stay in Sri Lanka, a Muslim MP Mohammed Mahroof was killed, presumably by LTTE. A week earlier, it had shot dead a Tamil MP, belonging to TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front), a moderate and somewhat elite Tamil party in the governing coalition. Both incidents revealed dimensions other than ethnic in this conflict.

Ethnic diversity alone is rarely a cause of social conflict unless it is reinforced, significantly and over time, by economic and political factors. In Sri Lanka, patterns of uneven economic growth coincide with its ethnic map. The northern and eastern regions are poorer and less developed than the western. Discontent has found an expression in Tamil nationalism. The southern areas which have also suffered from relative underdevelopment are predominantly Sinhalese. Yet, they too have been sites of major revolts. In 1971, the uprising by JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) was the product of a link-up of economic grievances with leftist militancy. This uprising shook the state to its foundations. In a remarkable demonstration of elite solidarity, the governments of Pakistan and India, which were then militarily confronting each other over the East Pakistan (Bangladesh) question, aided Sri Lanka's beleaguered government. In 1987, JVP led another violent campaign to oppose India's military intervention and the concession Sri Lanka's government was offering the Tamils. So where ethnicity coincided with economic discontent it contributed to separatism; and where the ethnic factor was absent it yielded radical or revolutionary violence.

The deeper roots of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka may lie in the colonial encounter and the nationalist ideologies it spawned. More specifically, it is attributable to Sinhala nationalism, and post-colonial state policies which issued from it. Even in outline, the recent history of this island country reveals a paradigm of the interplay of colonialism, nationalism, and post-colonial statehood which defines also the course taken by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 19th and 20th centuries. As elsewhere, the establishment of colonial rule signified in Sri Lanka the decline of native power, itself the result of a civilisational failure to forge and keep abreast with the new knowledge that was burgeoning through the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Colonial discourse devalued here too the local culture and history, and assigned to the natives an inferior collective identity on the basis of race, religion, and culture. Nationalism, as an ideology of difference, domination and communal solidarity, was a weapon of the coloniser.

The colonised confronted colonialism reactively — by appropriating its ideological weapon, methods and values. Often, the seeds of internal division and discord were intrinsic to this mode of appropriation. Scholars trace the roots of Sinhala nationalism to the 1880s in the works of Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and such fellow nationalists as the novelist Piyadasa Sirisena (1875-1946) and the dramatist John de Silva (1857-1922). As a reaction to the perceived decline of Sinhala civilisation, theirs was a revivalist agenda. In response to the coloniser's orientalist devaluation of their culture and religion, they extolled the virtues and superiority of Buddhist values and culture. As a means to establish the uniqueness of Sinhala collective identity, they began to emphasise its differences with the Other — Englishmen, Burghers, Dutch, Muslims and Tamils. "The revivalist movement", writes Sarath Amunugama, a Sinhalese intellectual and politician, "identified not only the Englishman but also Tamils and Muslims as 'foreigners' and as authors of their misfortune." The parallel with the writings of such formative figures in Indian nationalism as Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and Balgangadhar Tilak is striking.

As in India with Hindu nationalism, in Sri Lanka Sinhala nationalism co-existed for a time within the broader rubric of Ceylonese nationalism incorporating within itself Tamil and other elements. the exigencies of anti-colonial struggle yielded a merger of two nationalist strains resulting in a duality of discourse, and a split ideological personality — exclusionary and integrative, Sinhala and Ceylonese. Tensions existed, conflicts arose between Tamil and Sinhalese elements but they remained manageable. Some time after decolonisation there occurred, one might say, an unveiling of truth; the facade of Ceylonese nationalism gave in to the reality of overt Sinhala domination. The process climaxed in the "1956 revolution" led by the populist politician SWRD Bandaranayake, father of Chandrika Kumaratunga, the current president of Sri Lanka.

From a sense of opportunity more than belief, he undertook to render Dharmapala's Sinhala revivalist agenda into state policy. Sinhala communalism became in effect the state ideology. As was Urdu in Pakistan (including Bengali speaking East Pakistan), Sinhala was declared the sole official language, a measure that would adversely affect the Tamil middle and educated class, and also the English educated Sinhalese who had formed the back bone of the liberal strain in Ceylonese nationalism. Buddhist religious and cultural symbols were propagated as national emblems. To make matters worse, these policies coincided with exponential expansion of the state, a process in which Tamils felt discriminated. Prime Minister Bandaranayake was assassinated in September 1959, ironically by Sinhalese radicals who deemed his Sinhalisation measures inadequate and slow. His wife Sirima succeeded him.

Tamil nationalist sentiment began to radicalise during this period. As successive governments failed to develop a consensual and inclusive system of governance, radicalism gained ground gradually. Yet it was not until 1977 that LTTE carried out its first assassination, of Alfred Duraiappa, mayor of Jaffna. On 13 July 1983, when it carried out its first ambush killing 13 Sinhala soldiers, the LTTE had only 32 fighters. What followed was a tragedy and crime of historic import. On 23 July, Sinhalese mobs carried out pogroms against the Sinhalese communities in the western regions especially Colombo. Sinhalese intellectuals and human rights advocates say that President Jayawardene's government and party leaders encouraged the rioting and massacres. Thousands of educated middle-class Tamils left the country. The state failed to act forcefully, LTTE is said to have swollen within weeks to a thousand fighters. Civil war began then and continues still in the lush, tormented land.



Afghan elders take to guns

SEVERAL international aid workers pulled out of the beleaguered Afghan capital, Kabul, last Thursday as opposition forces pushed within 15 kilometres of Kabul which is still in the hands of the Taliban forces who control two thirds of Afghanistan's land mass.

Most of the frontline villagers north of Kabul have already been evacuated as fighting intensified over the weekend. In the past week an estimated 15,000 new refugees arrived in Kabul stretching an already overburdened system trying to cope with as many as 200,000 homeless people.

Much of the fighting in recent days has been concentrated north of Kabul, but there have been reports of bloody fighting in the northern Takhar Province and in the Tagab Valley, northeast of Kabul.

The United Nations has called for a ceasefire and fresh negotiations between the warring sides. But so far neither side seems willing to negotiate.

The Taliban religious army refuses to allow foreign journalists to travel to the frontline stopping them barely five kilometres outside the capital. Taliban soldiers were manning checkpoints at several intersections in the city of Kabul stopping motorists and searching all vehicles for weapons and ammunition.

The Taliban espouse a rigid form of Sunni Islam which banishes women from schools and the workplace, and forces men to pray in the mosques and grow beards.

Taliban captured Kabul last September, but their hold on the capital and the north of the country was always shaky. They are *most powerful in the southern, central and western parts of the* country.

With all the young men dead or injured, the aged men (left) of a village 60 kilometres north of Kabul — and loyal to Afghan warlord Ahmad Shah Masoud — train in order to capture the Afghan capital. It now seems that Masoud's forces, now aligned with northern ethnic Uzbek fighters under the leadership of Malik Pahlawan and a Shi'ite Muslim faction, form an anti-Taliban alliance *(photo: AFP)*

Kenya's no Congo

President Moi put Kenya ahead of the rest in Africa in terms of foreign investment. Now, *investors are putting his promise of political reform to the test, writes* ***Gamal Nkrumah***

The United States has plenty of irons in the African political fires now raging across the continent — and Kenya is no exception. Washington has constantly propped up the 73-year-old Kenyan president, Daniel Arap Moi, who has ruled Kenya with an iron fist for the past 20 years. Moi was a schoolmaster and he runs the country much like a school. *But now his style of leadership is being* openly criticised. Why?

On 7 July this year, police ransacked Nairobi's Anglican cathedral, other churches and offices of opposition parties on the pretext they were harbouring anti-government activists. Police fired live bullets, killing 13 people and injuring hundreds. Two days after the massacre, the US ambassador and 20 other Western ambassadors handed Moi a protest letter urging him to take political reform more seriously.

Moi presides over one of Africa's most lucrative emerging markets — Kenya's economy has become increasingly integrated with the global financial system in a way that few other African countries have. Growing capital market integration was spurred on by donor confidence in Kenya's economy and relative political stability in comparison with its African neighbours. Foreign direct investment in Kenya has been among the highest in Africa.

However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended loans to Kenya on 1 August. The IMF warned that Kenya's structural adjustment reforms are not enhancing the role of market forces and are not strengthening the basis for sustained growth because of pervasive corruption. Until then the IMF had asserted that Kenya achieved growing economic success by allowing market forces a greater role in an environment of macroeconomic discipline. Robust economic growth in Kenya was fuelled by substantial capital investment from abroad. Since when has political reform become the lodestar for the IMF's lending policies?

The IMF's feigned concern for Kenya's democratisation process is factitious. The IMF has bolstered Moi's Kenya for the past 20 years. So why has it suddenly discovered that there cannot be financial stability without political reform? The real issue is that the West cannot contemplate violent revolution or an uprising in Kenya à la Congo.

US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Twaddell was forthright in pinpointing the problem. After a meeting with Kenya's ambassador to the US, Benjamin Edgar Kipkorir, Twaddell said, "The demand for democracy in Kenya has not yet been met. We are deeply concerned by the violence that this failure to reform helped produce in early July."

The Kenya African National Union (KANU) has ruled Kenya since its independence from Britain in 1964. Under pressure from Western donors and opposition forces at home, a watered-down multi-party pluralism was gradually instituted *in the early 1990s. But opposi*tion leaders complain that legislative balloting is systematically rigged and that there are gross violations of civil and human rights in Kenya today. The opposition parties are also unhappy about the pace of reform. Kenya is no Congo, Moi no Mobutu and there is no Kenyan Kabila, but the Kenyan opposition is as faction-ridden and divided as ever.

Over the weekend, IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus warned that, "decisive steps to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of public funds," *must be taken by Kenya before* the IMF would lift its suspension of aid to the East African country. Micah Cheserem, governor of the Bank of Kenya and Musalia Mudavadi, Kenya's finance minister, two of the country's leading reformers, tried in vain to persuade the IMF to soften its position.

Kenya's currency, the shilling, depreciated by eight per cent within 24 hours of the IMF's announcement. It is said that investors and financiers, jittery about political and economic stability in Kenya, are considering withdrawing their investments from the country as confidence plummets. There are also fears that the World Bank will follow in the footsteps of the IMF and stop the release of desperately-needed development funds. If this bleak scenario actually becomes a reality, political unrest will reach unmanageable proportions.

The Nairobi Stock Exchange, one of the most promising in Africa, witnessed an astonishingly high turnover with 20-share index falling 13.68 points to stand *at 3453.18 after the IMF's declaration.* The fixed-interest market fared worst. Foreign investors sold $4.1 million worth of central bank treasury bonds.

Kenya was counting on the IMF's $74 million in foreign exchange support for the 1997/98 budget. The World Bank, the African Development Bank and multilateral grants tied to the IMF *plan* would have come up with an additional $141 million. The question is, can Kenya afford to antagonise the international financial institutions and do away with such aid?

Observers fear that an uncontrollable *chain-reaction is developing which* could severely harm Kenya's economy and those of its neighbours. Growth has picked up in Kenya's neighbours — Uganda and Ethiopia (10 per cent and 8 per cent respectively). In comparison, Kenya, which had a head start in the development of its agricultural potential, grew at the slower rate of 5 per cent. Rapid economic growth driven by agricultural production and exports in Kenya is now threatened by drought, land and water shortages and peasant unrest. But Kenya is the economic hub of the region and the West cannot afford to let it go under.

The IMF charges that the lack of transparency and accountability in public policy-making and excessive intervention by top-level KANU officials in economic activities in the country has led to widespread corruption at lower levels, and corruption tends to reduce government tax revenues and contribute to fiscal imbalances.

Exactly how events will unfold after *the IMF's decision is hard to predict.* Kenya's economic growth quickened during 1995 and 1996 following a decline in the late 1980s and an erratic economic performance in the early 1990s. The beleaguered Kenyan government was banking on the IMF's $220 million enhanced structural adjustment facility.

Last week, *Moi sacked Samuel* Chebii, the country's chief customs official who had done most to clean up revenue collection practices in Kenya. Chebii, a respected career civil servant was appointed last April to prove to Western donors that Kenya was serious about its *crackdown on corruption that threatens* to undermine Kenya's economic reform programme. Chebii's dismissal came four days after the IMF's caveat.

Moi promised constitutional and legal reforms. He pledged to root out corruption and institute accountable and democratic government. But the IMF went ahead and announced the suspension of its $220 million loan.

Observers believe that the collapse of the IMF agreement could result in cuts in bilateral aid programmes and jeopardise World Bank infrastructural projects. Specifically, the IMF is demanding measures to end graft, recover lost state funds, improve the management of the inefficient energy sector and review two power contracts which the IMF view with suspicion.

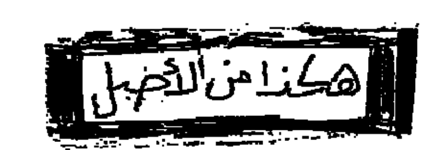
For the IMF, the last straw was Moi's dismissal of Chebii. The dismissal came in an apparent bid to prevent Chebii's relentless probing of a major tax evasion scandal popularly called the "Goldenberg Affair."

Central Bank of Kenya officials, Kenyan businessmen, top-level government officials and two international banks connived to fraudulently obtain millions of dollars from the state, under an export compensation scheme for fictitious gold exports in 1991 and 1992. The Goldenberg scandal involved the falsification of export invoices to benefit from government export incentive schemes. The massive fraud scandals cost Kenya the equivalent of 10 per cent of its annual gross domestic product — some $430 million.

The owner of Goldenberg is a Kenyan *Asian billionaire, Kamlesh Pattni,* who has acquired celebrity status because of his largesse and philanthrophic work. He has close business links with senior KANU officials and ministers in Moi's government. The Kenyan government is keen to keep Asian businessmen happy. The Asians' businesses are the backbone of Kenya's economy.

Kenya's attorney-general, Amos Wako, publicly stated that he is to file new charges "in due course." The Kenyan opposition forces, however, believe that *top-level officials* have *too much at* stake to risk allowing the Goldenberg case to fester on. Indeed, the Goldenberg case collapsed last month when two judges dismissed the 90 charges against the accused.

Moves by the Kenyan government to curb civil disturbances are monitored by Western donors and neighbouring African countries. Kenya has one of Africa's most vibrant civil societies — churches, mosques, trade unions and professional associations are very active. Kenya's creditors are cantankerous, but can we realistically expect Moi to impress on ruling KANU party stalwarts that they must surrender lucrative deals, tempting bribes and the patronage system that ensures *their* hold on power?



Businessmen wary of investment regulations

The executive regulations of a new comprehensive investment law has businessmen and investors grumbling, writes **Gamal Essam El-Din**

Amidst heated controversy, the cabinet last week approved the executive regulations of the Investment Guarantees and Incentives Law, the government's legislative center-piece designed to attract increased direct investments to the country.

The law, which was passed by the People's Assembly last May, gives investors extended tax breaks of up to 20 years, protection against nationalisation and sequestration, and states that producers will not be forced to comply with any mandatory pricing systems. It also aims to cut through bureaucratic red tape by grouping different investment incentives into one law.

The law, however, faced a barrage of criticism from businessmen and investors, who dubbed it restrictive and argued that it negatively affects many of the existing investment incentives.

Following last week's cabinet meeting, Talaat Hammad, minister of cabinet affairs, stated that the law's executive regulations explain in greater detail the package of incentives and facilities offered to investors in various sectors.

The regulations include one that charges each cabinet minister with the responsibility of specifying the areas, within his purview, to which the law's incentives and guarantees apply.

In agricultural terms, the incentives are extended to a variety of activities ranging from land reclamation — provided that irrigation of these areas be conducted by modern techniques — to animal, poultry and fish production. Sweeping incentives are also provided to almost all manufacturing and assembly industries, oil refinery projects, mining and exploration, movie studios and laboratories.

These incentives also apply to land and marine transportation projects and infrastructure activities, as well as to hospitals and medical centres — provided that 10 per cent of their services are offered for free. Other incentives relate to financial leasing projects and computer programming, and the projects financed by the Social Development Fund.

In the housing sector, incentives are confined to units leased for residential purposes only. All of the above projects will receive from five to 20 years in tax breaks depending on a number of factors, including the location and type of activities. Projects established in new industrial commmunities such as 10th of Ramadan and 6th of October will receive a 10-year tax exemption. Money investment companies will receive a 5-year tax exemption, while the New Valley and Toshka projects will be entitled to a 20-year tax exemption.

Article 20 of the law's regulations has entrusted the ministers of agriculture and land reclamation, local administration, housing and new communities, and tourism with drawing up detailed maps of the lands to be offered for free under the law to investors. These maps will indicate the activities subject to this law and will be renewed each year. They should be endorsed by the cabinet and sent to the administrative authority responsible under the law for corporate licensing procedures.

Eligible investors, according to Article 20, will have to submit requests for the free land to the administrative authority, outlining the proposed activity, the project's paid-up capital, and the size of area required. The administrative authority, in turn, will have two weeks to decide on the offer, and it also has to release a statement every three months, indicating the areas already allocated to companies. The cabinet, however, will maintain the right to cancel the contract and recover the land contract should its terms be breached by the investors.

The law's executive regulations also stipulated in detail the methods by which employees will be entitled to participate in managing joint-venture companies. Under the regulations, the company's board will form a supporting committee of employees to be entrusted with employee training, raising production and resource allocation, the main aim being to protect the rights of employees.

Chapter seven encompasses the largest part of the executive regulations — 30 articles. It deals with all aspects of free zone projects, such as the methods of converting an inland project into a free zone project, the procedures of releasing goods from free zone areas, the handling and storing of goods in these areas, and the conditions of employment licensing in these zones.

Although businessmen and investors on the whole were optimistic, they still voiced reservations over some of the executive regulations' articles.

Abdallah Tayel, an MP and general manager of Misr Exterior Bank, noted that the executive regulations made no mention of the name of the administrative authority to be entrusted with corporate licensing procedures.

"This is the second time this has happened, although the government promised that a presidential decree will be issued before the executive regulations are released specifying the name of this authority," said Tayel.

Ayman Nour, MP for the Wafd Party, also complained that the executive regulations place too much power in the hands of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

"The regulations give him the right to add new areas to the list of activities granted incentives," argued Nour. "He is also, without a constitutional right, empowered to reduce, cancel or increase taxes on projects subject to the law, as well as the power to strip investors of lands allocated to them and cancel the approval granted to free zone projects."

He also criticises the law's executive regulations for failing to clearly specify the areas in which projects located outside the old valley are eligible for the 20-year tax exemption.

"Press reports indicate that these locations include Toshka and New Valley projects, but we had hoped that the executive regulations would be more precise about these areas," he said.

Arab capital market hurdles

When it comes to the unrestricted activation of Arab capital markets on an international level, there is still a long way to go, reports **Shereen Abdel-Razek**

While capital markets have the potential of serving as vital conduits for capital transfer between countries through increased joint investments and greater economic integration, the laws governing these markets in Arab countries are an impediment to such growth.

Even some recent attempts to bring Arab capital markets closer together have not been successful, said Mohamed Abdel-Salam, head of the Capital Market Authority's (CMA) Information Centre.

For example, he said, a tripartite agreement between Egypt, Kuwait and Lebanon was concluded last September, enabling the cross-listing of shares and the transfer of information.

The agreement, however, "is worthless", he stated.

Under Kuwaiti law, citizens of other countries are prohibited from purchasing shares of Kuwaiti companies. Says Abdel-Salam: "This means that no individual Egyptian or institutional investor has the opportunity to buy shares in Kuwaiti companies, either through the Kuwaiti or Egyptian stock exchanges."

Kuwait is not the only country with such restrictions. According to the CMA Information Centre head, most other Arab countries have similar policies.

"As a result, there is no Arab company listed and traded on the Egyptian stock exchange, despite the fact that Arab investors are among the biggest players on our market," he said.

Other businessmen with first-hand experience working on the Kuwaiti exchange voiced similar concerns. Mohamed Hamed, chairman of the Okaz Stock Brokers and Investment Consultants, highlighted one of the obstacles.

Regulations governing the Kuwaiti exchange stipulate that to be listed, a company's capital should be no less than $5 million. The minimum capital for listing on the Egyptian exchange is $73,500.

Aside from the listing problem, Hamed noted that the brokerage commission agreed upon in the tripartite agreement was too low.

"While a broker's commission in Egypt varies depending on the size of the transaction, the agreement fixes the commission at 0.4 per cent," he said. "Given the transaction fees, this is too low."

There are also problems on the Egyptian side. Egyptian CMA laws leave open the door for foreign investors to acquire stakes in the capital of companies traded on the market. But some Egyptian companies' own statutes still prohibit the purchase of shares in them by non-Egyptians. Experts and brokers are calling for a change in these terms.

But where there's a will, there's a way, and some investors follow roundabout means to purchase stocks they ordinarily would not be able to buy. For example, said Mustafa Abduh, a stock broker, some foreigners purchase shares without listing their names on the certificates. This may enable them to trade shares and collect the dividends, but the shortcoming is that they do not have the same rights as other shareholders, including the right to participate in closed subscriptions, said Abduh.

Obstructive legislation also impairs investment fund activity, said Karim Owais, fund manager of the Egyptian Fund Management Group.

Arab nationals' participation in the 12 investment funds currently operating in Egypt is considerably low, with Arab holdings totaling only 10 per cent of the eight funds managed by his company.

Nevertheless, this is still greater than the figures for Egyptian investments in Arab-managed investment funds.

"There are no Egyptian investments in Arab funds," said Owais, manly due to the ban imposed by Gulf Cooperation Council countries on foreign investments in these funds.

Steps, however, are being taken to overcome this hurdle. Saudi Arabia is currently launching the first Gulf Cooperation Council investment fund, which will be open to foreign investors. The new fund will be co-managed by ING Barings and the Saudi-American Bank.

Local textile industry sees red


Photo: Antoine Albert

Lifting the ban on imported textiles could tear apart Egypt's domestic textile industry, as **Mona El-Fiqi** finds out

Textile industry representatives are in a state of panic over a government decision to lift the ban on imported textiles early next year.

The decision, which falls within the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), has industry officials convinced that liberalisation of the market will spell the end for domestic textile manufacturers. As a signatory of the GATT agreement, Egypt is obligated to lift the ban on textile imports by 1998, and on ready-made *clothing* by *2003*.

But domestic manufacturers, who have long enjoyed a competition-free market, argue that Egypt's textile industry is not ready for foreign competition.

"If trade liberalistion is implemented on textiles by January 1998, the local industry will be completely destroyed," said Ahmed Arafa, head of the General Investors' division at the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce (FECC).

Arafa, who is chairman of the textile manufacturing firm Goldentex, added that with all the problems the local industry is currently facing, foreign competition could prove to be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

The industry has recently been beset by a host of problems, foremost among which is the increase in price of raw cotton and the liberalisation of the cotton trade. As a result, the price of domestically-produced textiles has also increased.

Similarly, the taxes and customs duties imposed on the industry's machinery and production requirements have also gone up after the signing of GATT, as has the amount of smuggled textiles entering the country, claims the FECC's Arafa.

"Because there is no comprehensive control over the free zones in Egypt, the country is full of smuggled textiles," he said, contending that these products have wooed consumers away from their more expensive local counterparts.

But like other Egyptian public sector companies operating in what has, until *now, been a vacuum with regard to* competition, textile companies were charged with turning out low-cost products. Quality was, therefore, sacrificed.

There was no incentive for these companies to improve their production, stated Arafa.

With GATT-mandated competition looming ominously over the horizon, Arafa argues that the government should put in place a number of measures to offset the anticipated negative impact of liberalisation on local manufacturers.

"The government should protect the local textile industry," he stated. "It accounts for 25 per cent of Egyptian exports, and investments in this industry, which employs nearly 950,000 people, total LE25 billion."

The FECC official recommended that the government establish a separate tariff department for textiles, staffing it with experts who would determine the appropriate tariffs to be levied on imported textiles and garments.

But on the corporate level, Arafa admits that more could be done. Egyptian companies, he stated, must improve the quality of their products, with an eye on the fact that it is quality which reigns supreme in the global market.

Other recommendations presented in a memo to the minister of industry by the FECC's General Investors' department, called for the launching of a new development programme for the textile industry. The memo stressed the need to provide financial assistance to small and medium enterprises to increase their competitiveness with foreign producers.

The government should develop the public sector textile companies, which alone make up 70 per cent of the country's textile industry, before implementing liberalisation policies, noted Arafa.

Other industry officials are equally wary of the government's decision.

Mahmoud Ibrahim, chairman of the Textile Consolidation Fund, a governmental agency responsible for supporting the textile industry, also spoke out about the impending danger to local manufacturers.

"Local producers will not be able to compete because their prices will exceed those of imported textiles," he said. Ibrahim is the former chairman of the Holding Company for Spinning and Weaving, the legal owner of all of the country's public sector spinning and weaving companies that are in the process of being privatised.

Like it or not, however, liberalisation is on the way, stated Mohamed Maamoun, who headed the Egyptian negotiating team during the Uruguay round of trade talks.

"It's a commitment for Egypt, as well as any other World Trade Organisation member, to open its markets," he stated.

The agreement, however, gives the government the right to protect local industry by increasing tariffs on imports, or by imposing import quotas, if it is proven that liberalisation will negatively impact on local producers.

According to the GATT regulations, the maximum level for customs duties on ready-made garments is 70 per cent, while for textiles it is 60 per cent. These *figures can be increased if the government* proves to the WTO that admitting imports would cause grave harm to local industries.

According to Maamoun, textile industry representatives in 1995 had agreed to the lifting of the import ban. But it was the government, he argued, which opted to provide them with a three-year transitional period to improve the quality of their products and brace themselves for the increased competition.

Moreover, he stated, liberalisation will force Egyptian companies to improve their quality, thereby benefiting them in the long run.

While businessmen and many experts agree that the liberalisation policy is bound to hit hard at the textile industry, they are not sure how the government will react to the pleas to keep the ban in place a little longer.

But Arafa, for one, is convinced that the government will back down on its decision once it truly assesses the impact the liberalisation policies will have on this industry.

Market report

Trading volume up

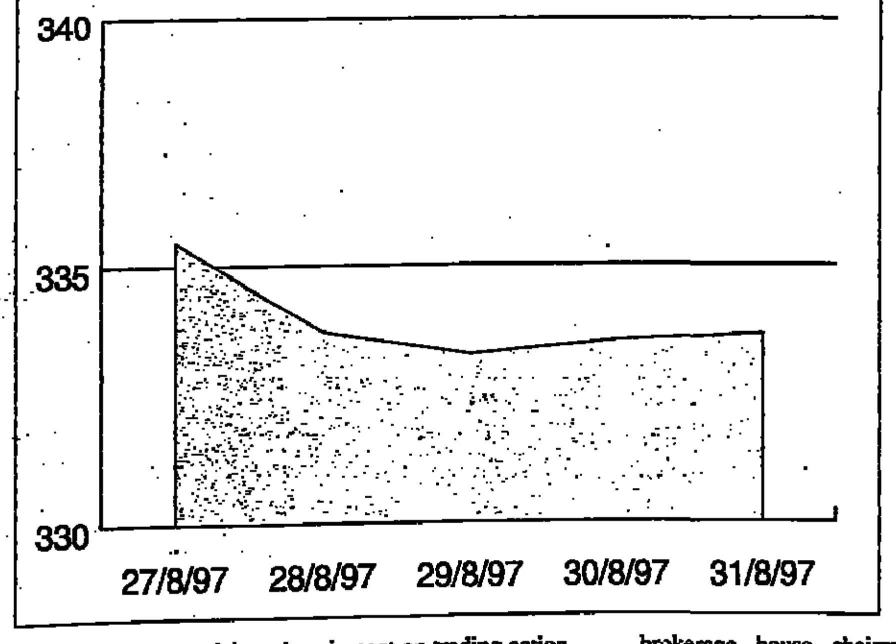
THE GENERAL Market Index settled at 335.18 points after registering an 11.54 point decline for the week ending 31 July. The volume of transactions, however, increased to LE256 million compared to LE218 million the week before.

Mohandes Insurance led the market in terms of total value of transactions, with LE23.8 million of its stock changing hands over the week. Its shares closed LE0.7 higher than their opening price, levelling off at LE45. Shares of the Housing and Urbanisation Bank registered an increase of LE9.7 per share and closed at LE83.7.

But it was the shares of the Cairo Housing and Urbanisation Company which recorded the most significant jump in price, gaining 17.9 per cent to close at LE18.5.

Shares of the National Cement Company, however, were the market's big loser, dropping by 14 per cent before closing at LE25.

In all, the shares of 53 companies recorded an increase, 45 decreased in value and 38 remained unchanged.



In related developments, experts stated that the introduction this week of a new method of calculating the closing prices of shares is likely to have a beneficial impact on trading action.

In addition, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) is currently considering a plan to upgrade the efficiency of traders. According to the proposed plan, brokers and brokerage house chairmen will not be given the license to trade until they pass an exam administered by the CMA, in cooperation with the Egyptian Capital Market Association.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

1 9 3

Egypt's first child care society was founded in 1908, largely at the initiative of an enterprising doctor who was also instrumental in establishing the Graduate Students' Club. An alarming rise in child mortality rates was among the main concerns prompting the creation of the society. In its first year, the society opened four clinics and a hospital, treated 16,944 sick children and performed 371 operations free of charge. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk traces the early life of the society on the basis of reports published in *Al-Ahram*

Illustration by: Makram Henein

It was a simple ceremony held on 2 January 1908 in one of Cairo's largest hotels during which Rushdi Pasha, then director of the Royal Bureau of *Awqaf* (religious endowments) and eventually Egypt's prime minister during World War I, announced the inauguration of the Society for Child Care. The birth of what was to become the most famous society in the history of Egyptian civic associations required a gestation period of nearly five months.

In the summer of 1907 there was an alarming rise in the child death rate. Approximately 3,000 children died every month during that season, an astoundingly high figure for a country whose population was just over 12 million at the time.

On 15 July 1907, *Al-Ahram* led with a story on "The rise in infant mortality". Among the causes it listed for this alarming phenomenon were the intense heat of that season along with inadequate health care and facilities. Other countries, it said, suffered a similar plight. Yet in France, "doctors have discovered a serum with which children can be innoculated in order to prevent them from dying. This serum, which has reduced the rate of child death in France to less than two per cent, contains sea water and is dispensed in all French hospitals. The hospitals in Italy have adopted this treatment with enormous success."

Two weeks later, under the headline "Infant nourishment", *Al-Ahram* discussed the prevalent rumour that the increase in the rates of infant mortality was due to water from cartesian wells. The newspaper attempted to refute this possibility on the grounds that this water source did not exist in the countryside in which there were equally high death rates. Moreover, it said, such increases in death rates existed before these types of wells were put into use. Instead, it argued that the likelier cause of the high child mortality rate was that women were ignorant of the proper ways and precautions necessary to feed their children.

In cities, *Al-Ahram* said that poor nursing customs were a major cause of infant mortality. In well-to-do families, it said, women feed cows' milk to their children. Yet, they are unaware of the importance of hygiene, for "the milk must be absolutely clean and pure, and therefore it must be sterilised."

In a letter to the editor, a certain Mustafa Anwar makes reference to "the eminent and patriotic physician Dr Abdel-Aziz Effendi Nazmi who has devoted his efforts to the spread of hospitals and clinics in all parts of Cairo and the countryside." Anwar suggests that Egypt adopt Nazmi's suggestion "to dispatch experts whose function it would be to counsel people on the proper methods of child care and to ensure that children are sent to hospital when they exhibit the symptoms of disease."

Dr Abdel-Aziz Nazmi was a noted ophthalmologist whose clinic was located on Abdel-Aziz Street. According to *Al-Ahram* and other newspaper accounts of the first decade of this century, Nazmi was a pioneer in the field of community work in Egypt. In addition to his efforts in establishing and developing the Society for Child Care, he was also instrumental in founding the Graduate Students' Club, the subject of a previous instalment of the *Diwan*. Nevertheless, it would take four full months before Dr Nazmi's proposal saw fruition, during which time the man was tireless in the pursuit of his aim.

During this interval, there was an active fund-raising campaign. From the lists of contributors published in *Al-Ahram* we note that the rural and urban notables, members of the liberal professions and the mid-level *effendi* (government bureaucrat) class constituted the majority.

Dr Nazmi was able to convince Hussein Rushdi Pasha, the director of the Royal Bureau of *Awqaf*, to become the chairman of the society. It was a clever move on the part of Nazmi, who clearly realised that Rushdi at the head of the society would secure the support of the *Awqaf*.

It was not long before Nazmi's idea gained such popularity that the governor and notables of Alexandria also initiated procedures to set up a similar association which they called The Society for the Protection of Children. The charter of the Alexandrian society also contained virtually the same statement of aims: "To seek all possible means in order to improve infant health for children up to the end of nursing for the non-educated and deprived classes of the populace and to contribute to the aid and treatment of the children of the poor by improving the quality of their food and hygiene and providing medical treatment and medicine free of charge."

Finally, on 6 December 1907, a preparatory meeting for the Cairo society was convened in the Graduate Students' Club. Rushdi outlined to the assembly what he perceived to be the most important goals of the society with which his name would be forever associated. The purpose of the Society for Child Care, he said, was to provide care and treatment to women in the final phases of pregnancy and delivery and to provide infants with care and treatment during the period of nursing. "And as women are reluctant to go to hospitals," he added, "the society will provide female doctors to call upon them in their homes, and dispense the necessary care and assistance."

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to consider the reference to "female doctors," as it is indicative of no small development in the practice of medicine specifically and public consciousness in general.

Until the time of the Napoleonic invasion, the business of child delivery lay indisputably in the hands of midwives. With the founding of the Qasr Al-Aini School of Medicine in 1828 during the reign of Mohamed Ali, attempts were made to upgrade the midwifery profession. The school incorporated a Department of Midwifery which counted among its students several Ethiopian slaves who were to handle childbirth for the ruling family and members of the Turkish aristocracy. Under the khedive Ismail, the department saw further improvements in training of midwives and the specialists who graduated from this institution were called doctors. Nevertheless, there was as yet nothing resembling a gynaecology department, as social mores and customs still forbade male doctors from undertaking the task of child delivery.

Against this background we realise the groundbreaking precedent of the Society for Child Care which was inaugurated in that modest celebration at the Continental Hotel. During this meeting, the society's first board of directors was elected, with Rushdi as chairman and Dr Abdel-Aziz Nazmi as secretary. Nazmi announced that the fund-raising campaigns had only raised approximately LE300. However, he added that the Royal Bureau of *Awqaf* had saved the day by donating an additional LE1,000 upon instructions from the khedive. A number of prominent dignitaries and notables were to follow suit.

Following the formation of the board of directors, Dr Nazmi issued a statement on 13 January, stating the society's objectives. These were to, "firstly, establish a special clinic for the observation and treatment of both healthy and sick infants, the distribution of free medicine and the provision of material and moral assistance to needy mothers; secondly, to establish separate children's clinics in every *awqaf* foundation hospital in Cairo, the said clinics to operate in the afternoons after the above-mentioned hospitals finish their working day; and thirdly, to provide free care and medical treatment to needy pregnant women through home visits undertaken by female doctors appointed by the society in order to offer all assistance possible in the delivery and care of newborn infants."

It is interesting to note that the founders of the new organisation were eager to enlist the assistance and participation of Egyptian women. Earlier, the board of directors issued a statement urging "women to assist in the donation of money and clothing for children and pregnant women."

Because it still ran counter to the mores of Egyptian society for men and women to assemble in public, a group of women met in the home of a certain Anis Bek in Saray Al-Qubba in order to found The Society for Mercy for Children. The aim of this society was to "lend assistance to the Society for Child Care."

Within a month of its founding, the Society for Child Care had set up its internal operating organisation. On 14 February, it allocated LE1,600 from its budget "for the purposes of funding three infant clinics and the medical relief of poor pregnant women from the quarters of Gamaliya and Bab Al-Shariya."

The most important step was to appoint a female doctor. Toward this end the society published an advertisement in *Al-Ahram* stipulating that applicants must have a legally recognised medical diploma. The position would pay between LE2.50 and LE7 monthly for assisting in the delivery of babies of impoverished women.

Once this matter was taken care of, the society's secretary announced that its operations would begin on 20 February with the opening of the two initial clinics. The first was located in the *waqf* clinic in Al-Helmiya Al-Gadida and the second on Al-Sadd Al-Barrani Street near the Sayeda Zeinab police station where there was another *waqf* clinic. The secretary also announced that the two clinics would operate daily from 3pm to 5pm for the purposes of treating "all children of all races and religious denominations." They would also "dispense medicine and perform any necessary surgical operations free of charge." Finally, Dr Nazmi urged "all the destitute and needy to bring their children to the clinics where they can be treated by an elite group of doctors who have been selected by the society and who have donated their valuable spare time for this worthy charitable activity."

Evidently, the fledgling society was so successful at proving its worth and seriousness of intent that Prince Hussein Kamel Pasha, who eventually became the next sultan, contributed the largest individual donation to date — LE500.

This stroke of fortune was most propitious for soon other members of the royal family followed suit. Contributions must have been quite generous, for it was not long before the society expanded operations. Indeed, within less than a month it was ready to open a central clinic in Darb Al-Ahmar. One learns of this development from the advertisement, published in *Al-Ahram* of 18 March 1908, announcing openings for "a skilful doctor, preferably experienced in infant diseases, for a monthly salary of LE10 to LE12, and a certified and experienced pharmacist for a salary of LE8 to LE10."

Three months later, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Bab Al-Shariya clinic, *Al-Ahram* reveals that the society had already opened two additional clinics, in Boulaq and Sayeda Zeinab.

After its initial five months, the board of directors met again in order to formulate the final draft of their charter. The aims were summed up in five points:

Firstly, to assist in the delivery of the infants of women in Darb Al-Ahmar and Bab Al-Shariya at the society's expense with the provision of licensed midwives and one Egyptian and one European female doctor, to monitor the health of both the mother and her newborn infant and to dispense material assistance to impoverished women throughout the period of delivery and nursing.

Secondly, to pay monthly subsidies to impoverished nursing mothers on the condition that they bring their children into the society's hospital for a weekly check-up.

Thirdly, to treat the illnesses of all children, regardless of their racial or religious origins, free of charge, under the care of expert doctors and to dispense the necessary medication for this purpose free of charge. The society will also dispense sterilised milk and conduct all surgical operations at the hands of highly qualified surgeons free of charge.

Fourthly, to perform female circumcision operations using the most up-to-date techniques.

Fifthly, the society would offer to bathe infants in hygienically tested baths and would distribute clothes to the needy.

In February 1909, the society's general assembly met to celebrate the first anniversary of its founding. Ali Bek Abul-Fatouh, a member of the board of directors and deputy chairman of the board of hospitals, appraised the assembly of the progress of the society over the previous year. The society, he said, had opened four clinics and a hospital. It had treated 16,944 children and performed 371 surgical operations and 116 female circumcisions.

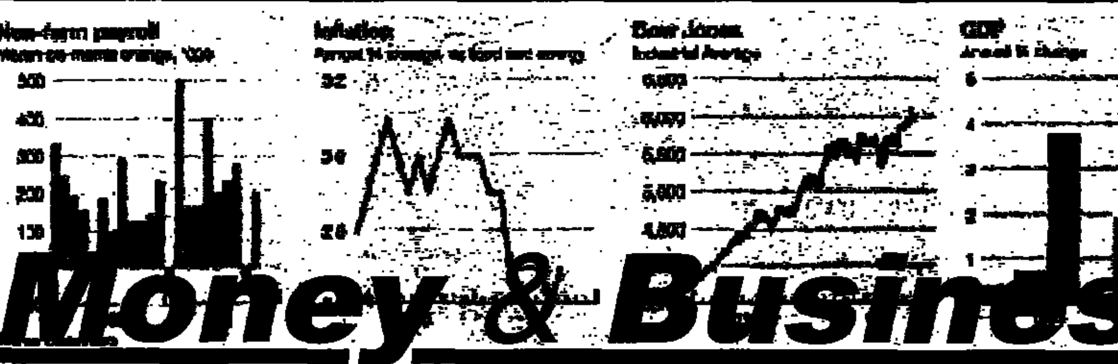
Indeed, the first annual report of the Society for Child Care proved an auspicious beginning for what would become one of the most valued charitable organisations in Egypt.

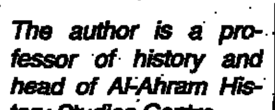
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

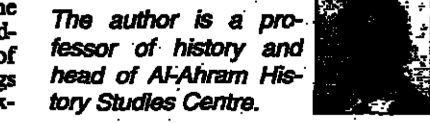
Free zone with Slovakia

AHMED Guweili, minister of trade and food supply, stated that an Egyptian exports fair will be held in October, in which Slovakia will take part.

Several contacts will be carried out to forge a deal to facilitate the trade exchange between Egypt and Slovakia, Guweili added. Slovakian exports exceed $9 billion, most of which are directed to countries of Eastern Europe. Exports include agricultural machines and chemical products.







Unitel to be held in Egypt

UNITEL, the hotel suppliers' fair, will be held for the first time in Egypt from 1-4 November 1997.

The fair will showcase the latest concepts and creative ideas in the field of hotel design and supplies, Companies from all related fields, from feasibility study offices to decoration companies, can be found in one pavilion so that investors can better acquaint themselves with the latest developments in the field. A fashion show and a cooking competition will also be organised.

6th ACITEX at the Cairo Conference Centre

TO SHOWCASE the latest information technology, Al-Ahram will hold its sixth Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) which will be held at the Cairo International Conference Centre from *18-21 February 1998. The Conference* Centre was chosen as the site for the exhibition in order to accommodate the increasing amount of visitors which the exhibition attracts every year.

The *exhibition* coincides with the convening *of the Artificial Intelligence Conference*. The exhibition will be organised by Al-Ahram in cooperation with the Egyptian Computer Association, the American University in Cairo, and AMAC. AMAC will also tabulate *statistics of visitors to the exhibition, a process conducted under the supervision* of Mr Ali Ghoneim, vice-board chairman of Al-Ahram and general manager of AMAC.

The British Computer Association will take part in organising the exhibition with the help of experts from all over the world.



Ali Ghoneim



Adel Abdel-Aziz

There will be partitions presenting major exhibitions such as Systems in Hannover and Cebit in Munich.

*Mr Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the executive branch of the Cairo International Confer*ence Centre, will be in charge of implementing the procedures necessary to hold the exhibition.

Al-Ahram will *provide all services such as* reservations confirmation, for computer and information technology companies.

For more information and reservations, contact Al-Ahram at tel. 339-1071, fax 3941866.

Latest printers from Ultra Computer Service

ULTRA Computer Service Co. is pleased to offer new laser printers from Panasonic, with their high quality of printing at 1200 DPI, considered the fastest of its kind available on the Egyptian market. This model is capable of printing 6 pages per minute, and can reduce or enlarge pages and even fit 4 pages on a single sheet of paper. Panasonic printers also feature a toner-saver feature that economises ink. Panasonic printers can run under any operating system, including Arabic and English Windows.

Ultra Computer Service Co. also announces the availability of Lantech UPS devices, which received the ISO 9001 certificate of excellence, as well as similar components, all backed by a guarantee and at special prices.

The management of Ultra Computer CO. has maintained its policy of providing the best in customer service and product maintenance since it began operating in 1988.

New appointees at the Chamber of Commerce

DR AHMED Guweili, minister of com*merce and supply,* confirmed the appointment of Hosni Ahmed Maatuq as head of the research and studies department; Farouk Mohamed Mohamed El-Mahdi as head of the department of commercial and economic affairs and general relations; *Mahmoud Ali Afi Awad as head of the financial* and administrative affairs department; and Mrs Abla Mohamed Mohamed El-Iraqi as general manager of administration.

NBE... A pioneering role in supporting the capital market

EGYPT has taken great strides in implementing its ambitious economic reform programme which basically depends on market mechanisms while giving room for the private sector to push forward economic development. In this connection, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has played a significant *role in innovating a number of instruments deemed* necessary for the efficient performance and success of the capital market, via establishing the following companies:

— Al-Ahli for Development and Investment (to manage investment portfolios and operate in the fields of venture capital and underwriting).

— *National Investment Co. (to manage investment* portfolios and operate in the field of underwriting).

— Al-Ahli Securities (a brokerage company).

— National Fund Management Co.

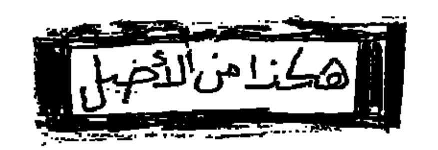
As a stark precedent in Egypt, *NBE established the first mutual fund with an accumulative return on 3 September 1994. The fund's capital amounted* to LE100 *million, meanwhile* the nominal value of its certificates accounted for LE500. To meet the growing demands and needs of investors, a second fund with periodical return was established in October 1995, with a total capital amounting to LE200 million. The nominal value of its certificates accounted for LE100.

In the light of the remarkable success of the two funds, NBE raised the capital of each fund to reach LE200 million and LE300 million respectively.

The dividends of the second fund amounted to 7.5, thus total dividends distributed reached LE47.6. On 10 July 1997, the price of the first fund's certificate recorded LE890.5, and the second *LE105.25.*

In line with its philosophy towards courting foreign investments with a view to enhancing economic development, NBE has established a number of funds abroad in cooperation with foreign financial institutions. Following the successful international offering of the shares of Egypt Investment Fund (the first fund to invest in the Egyptian market), with a total capital of $40 million, NBE established a second fund, Egypt Trust, with a total capital of $74 million. The capital was raised to stand at $80 million. The Bank's equity participation in the said fund accounted for 37 per cent, while Lazard Freres' was 63 per cent. It its worth mentioning that Lazard Freres was established in New York in 1848 and is considered one of the pioneering investment banks worldwide.

Furthermore, NBE is establishing another fund in Luxembourg in cooperation with Alliance Capital. The said fund *is established in participation with a number of foreign fi*nancial institutions, with a maximum capital of $100 million. and a minimum of $75 million. In addition, NBE will establish a management company in cooperation with Alliance Capital and Commercial International Investment Co.





Reparations: power and conscience

Equality, reconciliation and justice must provide the foundations for a new peace, writes **Edward Said**. These can only be built if Israel recognises the pain, loss and suffering it has inflicted on the Palestinians



The drama of Swiss banks being forced to reveal the contents, amounts and numbers of their secret accounts continues day by day. For years these extremely powerful and prestigious institutions took the position that the absolute secrecy of the identity of holders of bank accounts would never be breached: the country's credibility was at stake, as was its continued prosperity as the recipient of funds deposited there as a refuge from foreign scrutiny, persecution or generally unwelcome attention. But for quite some time now, the phrase "a Swiss bank account" has been synonymous with cheating or wrongdoing; the idea that there was one very safe place on earth where illicit money could be kept in absolute secrecy has appealed to every dictator and criminal throughout the world, with results for Switzerland itself that assured it both of affluence and a reputation for "neutrality."

It is also worth recalling that for at least two decades there has been determined Swiss opposition to the bank secrecy laws. The courageously outspoken Swiss intellectual and parliamentarian Jean Ziegler attacked his own country's policy as immoral since, he said, whatever benefits accrued to Switzerland came at the expense of the poor and oppressed in the Third World. Others joined Ziegler's campaign to do away with bank secrecy, but to no avail — that is, until through a combination of American political pressure, in alliance with the World Jewish Congress, earlier this year Switzerland was persuaded to open up its banking records.

Recently, the *New York Times* carried two full pages of names and accounts totalling 2,000 unclaimed accounts: this could not have happened without the pressure exerted on Switzerland by influential members of the US Senate plus distinguished Jewish-Americans. Last winter there were several days of congressional hearings in Washington in which witness after witness declared his/her knowledge of accounts held by Switzerland whose owners were Holocaust victims, but whose descendants or relatives were alive and competent to take over the funds. In time a commission was appointed by the Congress and was headed by Paul Volker, a well-known economist and former head of the Federal Reserve: its mandate was to secure as much knowledge and information as possible about these World War II accounts, to make them public, and obviously to get hold of the money for both Jewish and non-Jewish beneficiaries. A great deal was made of this in the international, but specially the US, media and, as pressure mounted on the Swiss government, various officials felt it necessary to resign in the face of mounting public outrage at what was seen as Swiss greed and obduracy. The case for disclosure was greatly helped by the defection of a Swiss bank security guard who smuggled out lists of names and accounts to the US; he later had to leave Switzerland but was immediately welcomed to America, given a hero's reception, and then a lucrative job.

Feeling itself shamed before the entire world, the Swiss government has given up on its secrecy so far as World War II accounts are concerned. (It is an interesting anomaly of the situation that General Mobutu of Zaire, who made off with several billions of his country's treasure, has so far not been required to declare what his Swiss accounts are; a cursory search by independent experts has revealed only about $14 million hidden in Switzerland, but since the US has not taken a position on his larceny, there has been no pressure to divulge the actual amount.) In a few weeks a referendum of Switzerland's entire population will be held in order to determine whether the country ought to establish an additional endowment fund for "charitable purposes," that will include restitution to Jewish as well as non-Jewish Holocaust victims.

Although it is quite clear that various individuals have been involved in this campaign against Swiss banking secrecy for entirely selfish, even cynical reasons, the whole thrust of what has taken place strikes me as entirely justified. Not all the pressure has come because of Jewish influence. Clearly the US is trying to end the Swiss practice of accepting drug-money in secret accounts; clearly, the European Community has little patience or use for Switzerland as an independent economic and banking centre inside, *but not* of, Europe. Be that as it may, one must also admire the persistence of the World Jewish Congress in pressing the case for reparations to Jewish Holocaust victims. Why should the victims of persecution and genocide also be deprived of their worldly goods, and why should their persecutors be given an additional victory? This is not a matter of revenge but of an injustice rectified. As to whether the Swiss bankers and people themselves feel that justice has been done, that is another question since there is no doubt that only the enormous power of the United States could have extracted the concessions that have finally emerged. The main thing to be lamented is that this same power has not regularly been deployed on behalf of other victims of injustice.

Analysis cannot end here, however. Israel is in a sense the state of Holocaust survivors and the victims of Western (especially Christian) anti-semitism. Theodor Herzl's arguments on behalf of Zionism always included the wish to end the persecution of Jews by creating a place for them where they would be the majority, not an oppressed and despised minority.

Many Western supporters of Israel believed that, in taking Israel's side in its dispute with what were always referred to very generally as "the Arabs", they were compensating for what their societies had historically done to the Jews. The facts of the matter are not so accommodating since, after all, Palestine was an already inhabited country whose natives were subsequently displaced and dispossessed, their society destroyed, and their remnant either hounded into exile or the rest of their territory militarily occupied since 1967.

A debate has been developing inside Israel on what the Haifa University psychologist and historian Benjamin Beit Hallahmy has called Israel's original sin — its treatment of the Palestinians from the Zionist movement's very inception through 1948 and 1967. There is now considerable evidence from research done on Israeli archives, in addition to the testimony and research produced by Palestinians, to ascertain that the tragic fate of the Palestinian people for the past fifty years has derived in large measure from Israel's behaviour — Israel, that is, acting as the state of the Jewish people.

An article in the 19-25 July issue of *The Economist* entitled "The Unchosen People" — a reference to the Palestinians as victims of Israel — describes the Israeli historians' debate about what role and what blame should be assigned to Israel's wars and to its army. This is an important development in that, for the first time since 1948, the wall of official denial has been penetrated, and the silence about what took place in 1948 has been broken despite the fact that some intellectuals still refuse to acknowledge the factual evidence. *The Economist* concludes as follows: "The war of Israel's historians is fated to continue. That is probably, on balance, a good thing. Nobody can deny that, whatever the original intentions of Zionism's leaders, their project turned out to have calamitous consequences for the Arabs of Palestine. It may be that by accepting their portion of the blame, Israelis will find it easier to reach a reconciliation with the Palestinians. But not, it is to be hoped, by rewriting their country's history."

Against the background of Swiss compliance with the World Jewish Congress's legitimate wish to have a secret bank accounts of Holocaust victims uncovered, it is plain that the Palestinian claim for losses to Israel ought at least to be addressed. It is hypocritical for Israel to require justice in one instance and refuse it in another, especially since nearly every one of the seven million surviving Palestinians today incurred major losses because of deprivation, dispossession, military occupation, combing campaigns, and terrorism.

To say that the only reason that the Swiss were forced to open their bank records was that the power of the US and the World Jewish Congress made it possible is to tell only part of the truth. Undoubtedly, power played a significant role, something the Palestinians have no hope of emulating. But it is also true that, were it not for Swiss acknowledgement of injustice, there could have been no redress of World War II evils. No one can know whether every single resident of Zurich and Geneva feels genuine remorse or not: the point is that the conclusion arrived at seemed inevitable, whether for reasons of power or of conscience or both.

Israel has never been required to face its own past, and has survived for fifty years as a state supposedly embodying the innocence of the victim. This, of course, is utter nonsense. Palestinian losses for which Israel is directly responsible are estimated at many billions of dollars, considering that in 1948 the Zionists had only succeeded in buying six per cent of Palestine's land area; the rest came by conquest and by driving out as many Palestinians as possible. Thus the Jewish victims of anti-semitism and the Holocaust produced their own victims, the Palestinians; even though it is difficult to formulate the claims of the victims' victim, the fact is that such a claim must be formulated by Palestinians above all, but also by Arabs and other supporters of human rights.

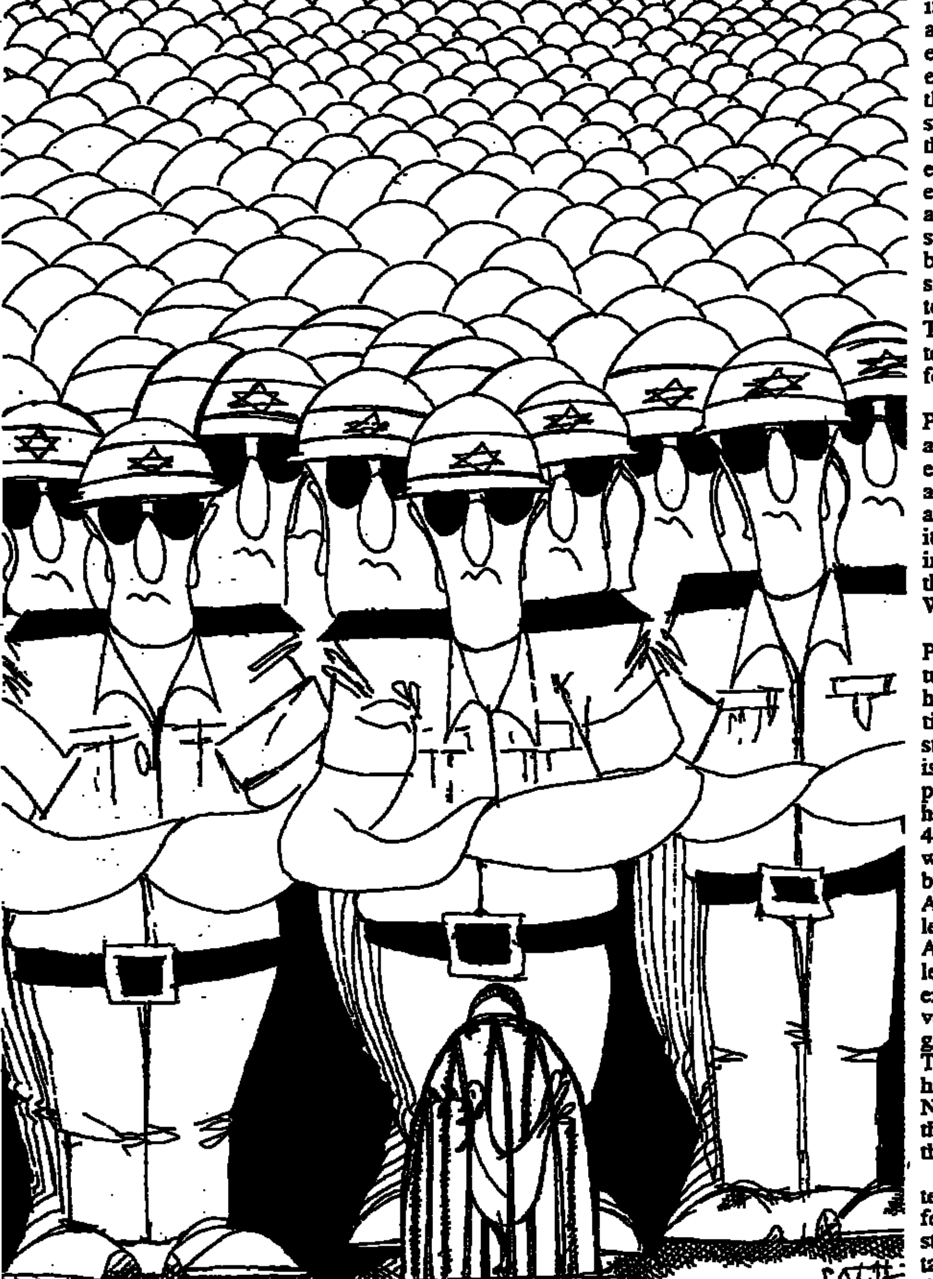
For the past half century, Palestinian struggle has focused principally upon armed conflict for understandable but, in my opinion, insufficiently analysed reasons. The myth of the heroic freedom fighter was allowed to stand on its own; hence it was easy for Israeli propaganda to turn Palestinians into terrorists, thus emptying out our claims for justice and reparations. From militancy and armed struggle, our leadership jumped directly into the concessions that have produced the disasters of Oslo, for which the large majority of Palestinians are today paying the exorbitant price.

More important than peace, for us, is acknowledgement of our past losses and sacrifices, and this, I am sorry to say, both the Arabs generally and Palestinian leadership in particular have simply forgotten about. But today's world is neither like that of 1948 nor that of 1967. There is an aroused moral conscience everywhere apparent in today's world, which is why the Intifada of 1987-91 achieved significant moral and political successes, and why the South African victory, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, and the coming of democracy to various Latin American countries have had the resonance they had. The point here is not just to blame the Palestinian leadership for another of its failings but to suggest that we should start to re-think our strategy for peace beyond the cul-de-sac of Oslo.

Haidar Abdel-Shafei's call to put the Palestinian house in order is a central part of the strategy, since one cannot wage a struggle for national rights without belonging or appearing to belong to a just cause. Corruption, torture, abuses of power, and a bankrupt rhetoric have no place now and should no longer be tolerated, any more than collaboration with an authority that practices such things can be tolerated. But the next step is in fact for us to turn ourselves into a community of conscience and to stand before Israel and its supporters, not as supplicants or as petitioners for pity, but as a people demanding that their presence and past be acknowledged for what they are. On this point there can be no vulgar trafficking, nor market-place haggling, no concessions and counter-concessions. We must remain true to the principles of our history and of our losses, which cannot be sidetracked by such things as the ridiculous "Allon Plus" plan offered by Netanyahu and his right-wing supporters. Peace can only come with reconciliation and restitution.

In short, we need an entirely new strategy of peace, a new peace movement on the basis of equality, reconciliation, and justice, and a rhetoric that puts our history on the world's agenda for the restitution of past wrongs. This cannot occur simply by going out begging. It has to be organised using the plentiful resources of the Palestinian diaspora community, which include money, human gifts and a mobilised will. In the end, though, there is no substitute for finding a new national language that does not bear within it the tired slogans of the past, nor the meaningless concepts of the American-Israeli peace process.

Sooner or later this generation of leaders is going to pass. We should start to think about the future constructively from now, but we cannot do so until we anchor ourselves in our real history and agenda. We have had one century of loss and failure. Surely, since even the Swiss banking system has had to change, we too can change.



No different from the rest

The fledgling Palestinian state is not perfect, writes **Amin Heweidy**, but it does represent a true beginning. Nurturing neighbours and favourable circumstances will make the difference



In his efforts to achieve the establishment of a Jewish state, Chaim Weizmann reached an agreement with Lord Balfour, the British minister of foreign affairs, to issue a declaration recognising Palestine as the national homeland of the Jews, and granting the Jews self-rule under British protection. Balfour asked Weizmann to prepare a draft of the declaration to present it to the Ministry of Defence, then headed by Lloyd George, and promised to exert as much pressure as possible to get the declaration issued. The Ministry of Defence, however, approved a declaration which differed from that proposed by Weizmann. The British declaration provided for a national homeland for the Jews to be established in Palestine, instead of Weizmann's proposal to recognise Palestine as the national homeland of the Jews.

On 2 November 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued. In his memoirs, Weizmann writes: "As I waited in one of the rooms in the Ministry of Defence, Sir Mark Sykes came in with the declaration and said happily, "Here, Dr Weizmann, it is a baby boy!" At first glance, I did not love that baby because it was not what we had desired, but I realised that what happened was to be a great event in our history." Later, Balfour *said that the declaration was his greatest achievement*; President Wilson expressed his certainty "that the allies are laying the foundations for a Jewish state in Palestine."

Thirty years after the infamous declaration, the state of Israel was established.

I believe that a new birth will take place before the end of the century. The delivery may prove difficult, or the baby may be delivered by Caesarean section; some may find it deformed or premature. But the child will be endowed with the gift of life. It is up to the family to care for it, correct its deformities through relentless effort, perfect patience and determination.

If my expectation proves correct, then the most difficult of conflicts can be resolved through solutions which seem only partially satisfactory. Israel is a case in point. At the time of its establishment, the dream was that of a greater Israel. After 1967, Israel hoped to obtain the area that had been under the British mandate in addition to certain areas scattered here and there. Today, however, with the establishment of the Palestinians state, Israel will have to renounce some of its dreams in terms of both area and sovereignty. Its earlier concept of a state extending "from the sea to the river", an understanding which precluded the existence of a Palestinian state, has been eliminated. Time radically alters hopes and dreams, subjecting them to change brought about by resistance and the the refusal to bow to the status quo. This factor is the most potent when slogans are reformulated as decisions.

The establishment of a Palestinian state does not arise from a void. Palestinian organisations are actually being established, and the Palestinian Authority is expanding its sway in the Gaza Strip and in the major cities in the West Bank.

The Intifada has brought Palestinian identity to maturity. Palestinians today have a national flag, a national passport, postal stamps, executive and legislative organs. Most important, the Palestinians have a police force of 40,000 strong, equipped with light weapons and led by their own commanders. Arafat is recognised as the leader of the Palestinian Authority by many world leaders, including the leaders of Israel itself — the very same people who regarded him as a terrorist in Tunisia. In fact, things have changed so much that Netanyahu has recognised the partial sovereignty of the Palestinian state.

Before attempting to determine the still undefined features of the Palestinian state, it is necessary to take a caveat into account. The result will be the result of compromises with circumstances and the balance of power. In other words, this new entity may not fit into the picture we had envisaged. To borrow from Weizmann's metaphor, the child will be neither beautiful nor even normal, nor will its proportions be harmonious. As such, it will need extra help and care during the various stages of its development.

Two factors will be decisive in determining the ultimate shape of the new state: first, the geographical factor: land area and topography, and the extent to which the independent Palestinian enclaves are connected; and second, the degree of sovereignty enjoyed by the state. The two factors, of course, are related to the question of the security of Israel, a life or death question, not only in terms of the demarcation of borders, but in terms of the very existence of Israel as an alien entity created by international forces, in an environment which ultimately rejects it.

The geographical factor is a major concern for Israel. Success in any battle, according to Montgomery, is contingent on "logistics, administration and geography". In fact, geography is the key to resolving the contradictions between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and to determining, by extension, the fate of the West Bank. The area in question covers approximately 6,000 square kilometres. On account of its elevation — at 100 metres above sea level — Israel *considers that the area it calls* Judea and Samaria commands its coastal plains, which are only a few metres high.

It must be kept in mind that 67 per cent of Israel's population and 80 per cent of its industrial base are situated in this coastal plain. While the River Jordan separates the highlands in the West Bank from Jordan, once ceded to Palestine, as expected, the highlands will be on a tangent, representing a potential threat to Israel's security. In addition, the line between Judea and Samaria, on one hand, and the green line, on the other, stretches for 361 kilometres while the tangent with Jordan does not exceed 100 kilometres, with a difference of 260 kilometres, which renders Israel's defence task easier on the side of the River Jordan, requiring less troops than on the green line. An offensive force from Jordan will find it more difficult to cross the river than to penetrate the green line. Thus, from the Israeli standpoint, Judea and Samaria are the backbone in the defence of *Eretz Israel*.

In terms of distance, the threat to Israel escalates. When measured from the green line, the coastal plain is much narrower than it is when measured from the West Bank, which is 55 kilometres wide. The coastal plain from Qalqilia to the sea does not exceed 14 kilometres, and *many of* the major Israeli cities are less than 14 kilometres away from the green line. Even Ben Gurion airport is only 10 kilometres away from the green line. These cities, therefore, are considered especially vulnerable to any offensive launched from "Judea or Samaria".

A research paper, written by Ephraim Anbar and Samuel Sandler and published in the summer 1997 issue of *Survival* magazine, expressed Israel's fears regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state as follows: "The military capability of the Palestinian state must be limited, and despite this requirement, its geographical position in proximity to the very heart of Israel, its expected instability and possible exposure to external motives, render it a potential threat. The Jerusalem-Tel Aviv-Haifa triangle, which accommodates some 75 per cent of the population and 80 per cent of the economic facilities, falls within the range of Palestinian artillery and even of lighter weapons. Most of the Israeli airports can be hit by surface-to-air missiles. Israeli communication lines can be hit by Palestinian militants if Palestinian demands are granted in annexing the highlands in the West Bank. That area could become a springboard for any Syrian-Iraqi-Saudi-Jordanian alliance to attack Israel and split it into two parts. The distance from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean does not exceed 80 kilometres, and in fact Tulkarm is only 14 kilometres from the coast. Under extraordinary circumstances, relations with Jordan could deteriorate, or the Hashemite kingdom could disappear overnight. Israel needs to control the Jordan Valley, to provide the intelligence needed to detect any threat from this direction."

From the geographic perspective, therefore, the Palestinian state will be established on land which has been measured out according to Israel's security considerations rather than concerns of mutual security, as is common practice in international relations. While the Palestinian demands are clear and agreed-upon, including the restoration of the occupied land east of the green line — the Gaza Strip, eastern Jerusalem and all or most of the West Bank — Israel has not yet decided on the final map, but will by all means regard the nascent state as an imminent and continuous threat. Palestine is the snake in Israel's bed. Israel cannot turn a blind eye to the danger, but must extract the snake's poison. Israel must control the resources of its neighbour in order to check its potential power.

This brings us to the issue of sovereignty. Israel wishes to maintain control of foreign policy and defence. It does not trust the political tendencies of the nascent state. Will it be pro-Jordan, which will lead to the formation of "a golden triangle", according to Prince Hassan, the heir to the Jordanian throne? Or will the provisions of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty and the Oslo Accord, which focused on the economy more than on any other concern, come to fruition? Will the nascent state turn towards Egypt, with which it has common borders and long-standing shared interests? Or will it run to Syria, a country spreading dissidence and hostility? The same applies to matters of defence. Israel needs to be vigilant so that no weapons are smuggled into the fledgling state. Even light firearms could be perceived as dangerous. There is no Sinai to provide a buffer zone between Israelis and Palestinians. Domestic security should also be added to the list of security concerns. Joint efforts, patrols, forbidden areas, and entry and exit gates at the crossings will ensure that it is not breached. In other words, the region in which the new state was created is one in which problems may be solved halfway, through compromise.

Palestine will be born before the end of the century. It has all the trappings of statehood, as well as executive and legislative authorities. Its dimensions are still unknown, but the new state has life and the potential to grow and develop like other living entities, provided it receives adequate care.

The size of the state of Palestine continues to raise questions. But the answer to all these questions is that there are many small states in the world; they are represented in the United Nations and enjoy the right to one vote, on an equal footing with the United States and Russia. There is also the question of how a state which has no army will defend itself against foreign aggression. Here again, many states have no armies; their military might extend to three or four tanks, commanded by a lieutenant-general or a field marshal whose only task is to take part in military parades on national occasions. Other states possess well-stocked arsenals, but have no human resources to operate such military equipment, and depend for their defence on other powers whilst paying the bills for their protection.

Traditional sovereignties everywhere have been reduced by the confusion between political and security borders. Such a reduction of sovereignty is evident in the establishment of buffer zones, the presence of international forces, the presence of satellites, the concessions granted to multinational corporations and lastly, the GATT agreements. The League of Arab States will admit one more state, albeit a minuscule one. It is no smaller than the Comoros Islands, however. The size of the population alone is not a decisive factor; in today's world, while the value of commodities is on the rise, it is man's worth alone which is steadily declining.

The writer is a former minister of defence and a former chief of General Intelligence.

life

be held in Egypt

A pioneering supporting the ital market

Al-Ahram Weekly

Levy's minimum

A flurry of diplomatic activity over the past few days desperately sought to find new ground upon which to re-launch the crisis-ridden peace process. But it will take much more than accusations and insinuations couched in markedly diplomatic terms to salvage peace from the abyss into which it has seemingly plunged.

During his Cairo meeting with President Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, the Israeli foreign minister again stressed the need for a Palestinian commitment to security. Israel's actions in response to the Jerusalem bombing last week, Levy said, were the minimum that could be taken.

But what then, if collective punishment of the Palestinians is the minimum, would the maximum have been? Another Qana massacre, perhaps.

Palestinians may not have been killed directly in the reprisals for the Hamas bombs, but the borders were again closed, more Palestinian homes destroyed and the daily lives of thousands were severely disrupted. If nothing else, this kills confidence and, therefore, drastically undermines any and all efforts at peace.

In this light, any platitudes proffered by Netanyahu or Levy are little more than naive rejoinders. Guaranteeing Israeli security would more likely have come from standing firm in the wake of the bombing than from freezing upcoming negotiations and imposing more conditions.

In freezing the peace process, Israel has put in the balance not only its security, but also that of the region. And, as any, including Netanyahu, should be able to divine, neither one can be separated from the other.

Moreover, in imposing sanctions on the Palestinians. Netanyahu has played right into the hands of Hamas and others who would see this process collapse altogether. Despite Levy's claims about Israel's intentions, such sanctions do undermine Arafat's authority. Then again, Netanyahu has proven to be as politically astute in dealing with the Arabs as in honouring the pre-existing peace agreements.

The hope now is that cooler minds will prevail, and that the other partners in peace will embrace their responsibility in this process with renewed vigour.

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Two faces of MENA

Ibrahim Nafie examines the arguments of the pro- and anti-MENA lobbies

Since MENA III was convened in Cairo in November 1996 there has been no progress of note in the peace process. The Palestinian-Israeli track is mired in tension and mutual acrimony. The Syrian-Israeli track has deteriorated to the extent that Israel has issued renewed threats of warfare against Syria and as long as the Syrian track is deadlocked there can be no progress on the Lebanese front. It is little wonder, then, that attendance at MENA IV, due to be held in Doha in November, has become the subject of controversy.

Events of the past year make it clearer than ever that Israel is intent on blocking all bilateral negotiations. It continues to refuse to implement agreements already concluded and insists on endless renegotiations in an attempt to buy time in which to Judaise yet more areas of occupied Arab land.

The Arabs, for their part, have always insisted that the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the negotiations are integrally linked and believe that if Israel deliberately impedes bilateral negotiations then they should respond by slowing the pace of multilateral negotiations. Normalisation, the Arab parties to the peace process insist, should be the fruit of, not the incentive to, a just and comprehensive peace.

Against this background, Saudi Arabia's recent announcement that it intends to boycott MENA IV has added fuel to the controversy. Those in favour of attending see the conference as a mechanism that links large international companies and major entrepreneurs with specific infrastructure and business enterprises intended to foster development. It would be a shame to interrupt this dynamic, they argue.

Opponents of MENA IV, however, insist that the conference is qualitatively different from other forms of regional cooperation. They hold that the ultimate aim of MENA IV is to end the Arab boycott of Israel at a time when Israel continues to occupy Arab land. There is no justification for continuing this series of conferences, they believe, as long as the bilateral track of negotiations has come to a halt as a result of the extremist policies of Israel's Likud government.

Other, more specific concerns, revolve around US-Egyptian relations. Advocates of MENA IV fear that for Egypt to boycott the conference would only give further ammunition to that faction within the US Congress actively seeking to reduce US aid to Egypt. As long as Egypt effectively manages its attendance at the conference, they say, there is no reason to jeopardise "good" relations with the US.

Those opposed to MENA IV argue that boycotting the conference is unlikely to create further problems in US-Egyptian relations. Measures to reduce levels of US aid to Egypt have already begun in Congress before Egypt declares its position regarding the conference. Moreover, if the US values its relations with Egypt, it should understand the Egyptian position vis-à-vis the critical issues facing the region.

Other differences between the pro- and anti-MENA camps focus on perceptions of Egypt's regional role. Those in favour of Egyptian participation claim it will underline Egypt's centrality as a regional power and underscore the perception that Egyptian diplomacy is a true force of moderation in the area. Opponents, however, argue that Egypt has already created a balanced formula for reconciling the bilateral and multilateral tracks that will successfully preserve its Arab role. Should Egypt decide to attend, in spite of the freeze in bilateral negotiations and the declared intention of Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries to boycott the conference, this could spark inter-Arab discord which would be particularly detrimental at a time when Egypt is seeking to promote Arab solidarity.

Those in favour of attending MENA IV have argued that it is possible for Egypt to have an official presence at the conference while boycotting it in substance. In fact, they add, Egypt can use this conference to promote the Arab position that normalisation will remain impossible as long as Israel persists in the policies that have halted bilateral peace negotiations. Supporters of the boycott, though, insist that Egypt's presence at the conference, regardless of the level of participation, will imply a tacit backing for Israel's desire to separate the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the peace negotiations. It will convey the message that despite reneging on agreements and impeding the peace process, Israel still deserves to enjoy normal relations with the Arab world.

The positions of the anti- and pro-MENA camps are perfectly clear. What remains is to make a considered judgment on whether or not to attend, a judgment that must be based on considerations of how best to serve the interests of peace.

One state — two systems

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that the slogan 'one state-two systems', first implemented with the return of Hong Kong to China, can have implications far beyond China

The issues put forward by the return of Hong Kong to China are of significance not to Hong Kong alone, or to China alone, or to Asia alone, but to the world at large, including the Arab world. The motto 'one state-two systems' was raised to justify a deal between Communist China, keen to restitute Hong Kong from Great Britain and reunite the Chinese nation, and Hong Kong's powerful business establishment, which was not ready to abandon the capitalist system responsible for the colony's economic success story. So Beijing accepted the compromise solution encapsulated in the above motto.

The novel formula worked out between the two parties in the case of Hong Kong could well extend to other cases. It will certainly affect the status of Shanghai, historically China's main port on the Pacific Ocean before the communist takeover. Shanghai's authorities will take advantage of the prerogatives enjoyed by Hong Kong to demand a greater degree of liberalisation, which the seaport will be granted if Beijing is convinced the experiment could reap fruit. Indeed, its success could be used to entice Taiwan into striking a similar deal with the motherland based on the same 'one state-two systems' formula. In all cases, ideology is discarded as an obstacle in the way of national unification.

The formula could become even more generalised. Once the principle of organic linkage between regimes of divergent ideological persuasions is established, it can eventually apply to other cases in Asia, possibly even to groupings that would include both China and Japan. This will inaugurate a new type of relationship between sovereign states in Asia, in which, contrary to the European experience, the systems of capitalism and socialism would be complementary instead of mutually exclusive. The development of a symbiotic relationship between the two Asian superpowers could serve as a blueprint for similar projects in the 21st century. Actually, it is in the interest of both China and Japan to stand up to the United States' ambition to impose a unipolar world order in the aftermath of the breakdown of the bipolar world order. Their common endeavour could lead to the emergence of an Asian pole, no less significant than the European pole, in the buildup towards a multipolar world order.

The European model of a bipolar world order, which initiated the Cold War in the aftermath of the Second World War (a zero-sum game with winners and losers in both cases), need not have been the only possible bipolar model. The model was based on the principle of mutual exclusion according to which each of the two poles aspired to the elimination of the other. "Peaceful co-existence" was never more than a tactical slogan dictated by the sheer impossibility of applying the strategic objective for fear of triggering a thermonuclear war that would in all likelihood annihilate both parties.

Actually, the bipolar order collapsed not because the ideologies of the two contending parties (socialism versus capitalism) were mutually exclusive, but because of the arms race between them. When former US President Ronald Reagan declared that he was ready to include outer space in the race and launched his Star Wars project, Gorbachev decided to retire from a race in which the Soviet Union was technically outmatched on the grounds that he was not ready to sacrifice the welfare of yet another generation of Soviets. Perestroika was meant to be the framework in which coexistence could be built up between the two sides, but the Soviet Union collapsed, thus proving that the arms race, not the ideological confrontation, was the key factor.

Is a bipolar model not built on confrontation, but on inter-linkage and cooperation between two divergent poles necessarily an Asiatic model only? Obviously not, as illustrated, for instance, by France's cohabitation experiment. Three times in the last decade, the country's president and its prime minister stood on opposite sides of the ideological fence. In the first two experiments, the president was a Socialist (Mitterrand) and the prime minister a representative of the Right (first Chirac, then, in a second period, Belladur). In the current, third experiment, the president (Chirac) represents the Right, the prime minister (Jospin), the Socialist Left. Cohabitation is thus no longer the exception, even if not necessary the rule. What makes it more imperative than ever is that both parties have to face the threat of a xenophobic Far Right that is regarded as a contemporary expression of racism and fascism.

Actually, the renunciation of war as a determining factor in world politics and the assumption that all conflicts can be resolved by peaceful means, a trend that is further consolidated by the emergence of what has come to be described as 'globalism', i.e., a growing network of economic interdependence between states, are factors tending to make the contract (i.e. political agreements) rather than the crude balance of (military) power the most prominent factor in world politics. As they are now contemplated, however, these contracts are not necessarily fair or equitable, but can cloak new forms of inequity and injustice. For example, a 'one state-two systems' formula applied to the Israel/Palestine case might appear to be the realisation of the Palestinian dream of a 'democratic secular state' in Palestine, based on culturally distinct systems for Arabs and Jews; in fact, however, it is much more likely to become a Zionist state where Israelis will have the final say on anything of real import.

In the final analysis, the question is to what extent the 'rule of law' can be sustained in a world system plagued by deep inequalities, and where injustice breeds frustration that vents itself in violent outbursts outside the law — a phenomenon that is now commonly termed terrorism.

Politics of despair

By Naguib Mahfouz

The explosion in West Jerusalem came as no surprise. President Mubarak and the Arab leaders have long warned that obstructing the peace process would have grave consequences. The president warned that Israeli policy would lead to violence. If people are driven to desperation and totally deprived of any dignity and self-respect, they will be prepared to do anything. Those two youths that blew up the Israeli market in Jerusalem did not plan their action beforehand; they just blew themselves up.

It is time for Israel to review its Palestinian policy and put an end to confrontation. I was stunned by certain Israelis who, surrounded by corpses, declared that there could be no peace with the Palestinians. Without peace, how can Israel achieve the security it so badly needs?

Many young Arab men are very impressed by the two young suicide bombers, and I consider this an extremely dangerous phenomenon, since it means that despair is no longer the monopoly of those living under Israeli occupation. That poses a real threat to the future of peace in the Arab region.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Violence begets violence

Al-Ahali: "We are neither warmongers nor enemies of peace. However, we object to unacceptable peace deals that can do more harm than good. Therefore, we call on the Arabs to reconsider the peace process and not resume the negotiations under the present circumstances. The discontinuation of the negotiations cannot harm the Arab cause. The period for which the talks are halted can help consolidate the Arab position through a revival of the Intifada and the boycott of Israel. This will force the Israelis to rethink the peace process and admit the fairness of Arab demands."
(Lutfi Waked, 30 July)

Al-Wafd: "We are opposed to violence and bloodshed, but Palestinian violence is triggered by Israeli violence. Israel's hard-line policies on the peace process and its intransigence over settlements, Ras Al-Amoud and Jebel Abu Ghneim, are responsible for the Palestinian reaction in Jerusalem and elsewhere... Violence begets violence. The treatment the Palestinians are receiving at the hands of the Israelis can only be rectified when Israel realises that it will lose as much if not more than the Palestinians by wrecking the chances for peace. Operations like the recent one in Jerusalem can only be stopped by the resumption and success of the peace process."
(Editorial, 1 August)

Al-Gomhuria: "Once again we ask Netanyahu: Do you ever learn? Are you totally incapable of listening to those with more experience than yourself? Your attempts to vent your wrath on the Palestinians will only fan the flames of discontent. Any retaliation against the Jerusalem bombings will simply undermine any lingering hope for the Palestinians or Israelis... The security and stability of the Middle East lie in the hands of Netanyahu. If he is looking for the interests of the Israelis he should muster the courage to declare the resumption of the peace talks. Only then will everyone breathe easily and the situation change. But who ever said that Netanyahu has an ounce of courage?"
(Samir Ragab, 1 August)

Al-Ahram: "It is impossible to separate the Jerusalem bombings from the circumstances that prevailed in the region since Netanyahu came to power. Netanyahu adopted a policy of might is right, opened the Aqsa Mosque tunnel, sanctioned the building of more settlements and sent the army to enforce harsh security measures in Hebron to quell anger against the posters insulting the Qur'an and the Prophet. Israel's actions do not grab the headlines the same way Palestinian suicide missions do. The latter are branded as being responsible for destroying the peace process. It is as if Netanyahu's daily actions do not oppose peace and the peace process and the only side that needs to be penalised is the Palestinian."
(Salah Montasser, 2 August)

Akhbar El-Yom: "Was there any doubt that Palestinian violence would explode upon the scene? And did anyone really believe that the Palestinian nation will take Israeli crimes and US prejudices lying down? The Palestinian authorities have offered every possible concession in the Oslo Accords and what was the result? Nothing except more hardening in the Israeli position and attempts to enforce a *fait accompli* and an unconditional surrender on the Palestinians... It was inevitable that the situation should come to a head. The Jerusalem suicide operation will not be the last. There is a volcano of repressed anger waiting to erupt... The US blatant bias for Israel is responsible for the demise of peace."
(Galal Aref, 2 August)

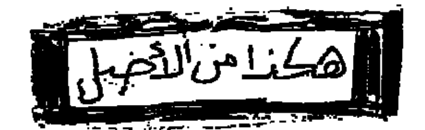
Al-Ahram Al-Arabi: "The picture is undoubtedly horrendous but it came as no surprise. The Netanyahu government might as well have planned the attack and hoped for a maximum of Israeli casualties. That government has paved the ground for the recent bombings by hindering the peace process and reneging on previous commitments... The provocative atmosphere created by the Netanyahu government encourages acts of violence, not just by the Palestinians but also by extremist settlers. The Netanyahu government is the prime mover behind the incident."
(Abdel-Aati Mohamed, 2 August)

October: "Peace is something all sides should accept and work to achieve. There is no point in one side making all the effort while the other side remains indifferent. This could only lead to an impasse. Had Israel heeded previous warnings, the horrendous explosion in Jerusalem would not have taken place. Neither killing nor terrorism are acceptable. Peace is the target. The Israeli government should never have pushed the Palestinians into despair and expected them not to react."
(Ragab El-Banna, 3 August)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



I drew Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in his customary pose, his chin resting pensively on one hand, a bit like another thinker, immortalised by Rodin. Although he looks glum here, his eyes, staring off into the distance, seem to see a better future for the Palestinians. His scarf, however, is gathered in folds which, exaggerated slightly, echo the sharp barbs of the wire surrounding Palestine.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

What was the point?

Are efforts to "salvage" the peace process of any use?

Ever since the Likud *government* came to power a year ago, most efforts made by either the Palestinians or Egypt and Jordan, and, to a lesser extent, by the US administration, focused on trying to stop Netanyahu from dealing the *coup de grâce* to the peace process. The main goal was how to keep Netanyahu's hands off the peace process, or, more precisely, how to rescue the peace process from Netanyahu and Israeli extremists.

No one can seriously claim that the bombings in West Jerusalem have obstructed or derailed the forward march of the peace process. They have, however, given Netanyahu and the US administration a perfect pretext to frustrate both Arab efforts and European pressures to resume the negotiations on a more balanced ground, especially vis-à-vis Jewish settlements and the implementation of the Oslo Accords. This comes as a crowning of the anti-peace achievements made by Netanyahu in the past months with the strong backing of the US Congress and the Zionist lobby in the US administration.

Was the suicide bombing *a carefully calculated* conspiracy, orchestrated by Mossad, or, more likely, the result of Palestinian desperation at the Netanyahu government's policy of repression and strangulation? What is certain is that the suicide bombings have no positive implications for the Palestinian struggle, unless they are merely the first sign of a new Palestinian Intifada in response to the Oslo fiasco. If this does not take place, these suicides will only temporarily palliate pent-up anger, and will serve the purposes of Israel much more than those of the Palestinians.

Netanyahu speaks the jargon of peace and claims that the real issue is the Palestinians' commitment to guaranteeing Israeli security. Israel's commitments to peace, in this perspective, are incidental. In the meantime, Israeli officials and settlers lie, and swallow up what remains of Palestinian land.

Since Netanyahu's accession to power, Arab efforts to rescue the peace process have only enabled Israel to break the tie between the two main components of the land-for-peace formula *which formed the basis* of the Madrid conference. Now, it is quite clear that Dennis Ross' mission will be limited to a discussion of Israeli security-related issues rather than the peace process. *In other* words, the rights of Palestinians will not be discussed.

If the question of peace in the Middle East has been reduced to guaranteeing the security of Netanyahu and his extremist government; what is the point of even talking about salvaging the peace process?

The Palestinians now are faced with two bleak options: either leave Gaza and the West Bank under the absolute power of Israeli occupation, while the Palestinian Authority and Arafat operate purely as policemen in Israel's service; or watch Israeli forces re-occupy all the self-rule areas, as they are indeed threatening to do.

One often wishes that Oslo had never happened.



Soapbox

No peace for Jerusalem

The impasse in the peace process has provided the major impetus behind terrorism and extremism on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The Palestinian people are beset by an increasing sense of despair and frustration.

The summary measures adopted by the Israeli inner cabinet contravene all agreements signed between Palestinians and Israelis, and amount to a declaration of war on the Palestinians.

Netanyahu has the audacity to talk about peace. What kind of peace is this? He has isolated the Palestinian people from the outside world, blockading Palestinian towns and cutting off the West Bank from Gaza. He speaks of peace while mounting police operations inside the areas subject to PA control.

He would do better to ask himself how the situation could have deteriorated so drastically. The answer, after all, is staring him in the face: *the collapsed peace process*, confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, economic blockade... Adding insult to injury, he continues to degrade the Palestinian and Arab people by encouraging Israeli hatred of the tenets of Islam and Christianity.

To guarantee regional security, we must speed up the peace process, on all tracks. Netanyahu must implement the terms of the agreements already concluded between the Palestinians and Israelis. He must call a halt to all settlement activities and confiscation of Palestinian land and enter immediately into the final phase of negotiations.

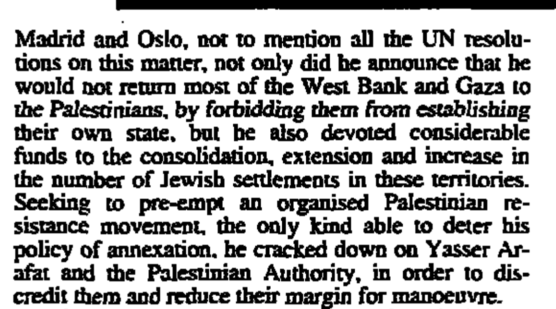




This week's Soapbox speaker is the Palestinian ambassador in Cairo.

Zuhdi Al-Qudra

Catastrophes to come



The explosions in West Jerusalem were only to be expected, writes **Eric Rouleau**. How many more victims will the current peace process claim?

It may be true that international relations are often marked by the seal of hypocrisy, whether one practices it or resigns oneself to it in the name of higher interests, but the duplicity which characterises the situation in the Near East has reached intolerable levels. Is it honest, credible, or even useful to repeat that the peace process, in its Oslo or Madrid formats, is still alive? Any formula goes, it seems, in this game of deceit: according to the protagonists in the conflict and the major powers, the process "has slowed down", is "compromised", "threatened", "wounded" or "dying", but never actually dead.

One could, if need be, go along with this lie — if *only it were to lead to the desired settlement. So far*, however, it has merely propagated fantasies and confusion. Whether because of lack of courage, helplessness or complicity with the new team in power in Israel, most of those involved have sought to deny the evidence: that the accession to power of the Likud and its allies has smashed the very principle on which Oslo and Madrid were founded: that which prohibited the acquisition of land through violence.

Yet it was clear from the outset that the prevailing balance of power, the extremist nature of the coalition, and, especially, the US's virtually unconditional support would not incite Binyamin Netanyahu to commit political suicide by renouncing the ideology, the very raison d'être, of his party. Those who sought to endow him with an acceptable image have often praised his "pragmatism", comparing him with his predecessor, Menachem Begin, who was supposedly motivated by "realism" in returning the Sinai to Egypt. This parallel, however, does not hold up for long under serious analysis. The former head of the Likud only made peace with Egypt in order to neutralise its role in the Arab camp and to go about quietly absorbing territories that, according to advocates of annexation, were part and parcel of the Jews' patrimony, made out to them by God and History. The second part of Menachem Begin's strategy was to invade Lebanon in 1982, with the declared aim of destroying the PLO, killing its leaders, and thereby guaranteeing definitive control over the Occupied Territories.

All in all, Netanyahu has been less of a hypocrite than those willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. It is true that the Israeli prime minister had promised to respect *the Oslo Accords, but he never concealed* his determination to annex the Golan, the Arab sector of Jerusalem, and a hefty chunk of the West Bank. He consistently violated accords he was pretending to follow, and put forth a host of pretexts to avoid both the agreed-upon evacuation of parts of the West Bank, and the continuation of negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority.

In further defiance of the fundamental principle of Madrid and Oslo, not to mention all the UN resolutions on this matter, not only did he announce that he would not return most of the West Bank and Gaza to *the Palestinians, by forbidding them from establishing* their own state, but he also devoted considerable funds to the consolidation, extension and increase in the number of Jewish settlements in these territories. Seeking to pre-empt an organised Palestinian resistance movement, the only kind able to deter his policy of annexation, he cracked down on Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, in order to discredit them and reduce their margin for manoeuvre.

Unfortunately, the leader of the PLO and his collaborators contributed to their own mutilation. Their attitudes, the brutality with which they repress opposition, in violation of human rights, their mismanagement of public funds, not to mention the corruption of which some are now being accused, led them blindfolded into the Netanyahu regime's game.

Given such disastrous circumstances, no prophet was needed to predict the explosions of violence that ensued. Everybody knew they were coming. French President Jacques Chirac, the British foreign secretary, and other Western high officials had publicly expressed their misgivings on this matter. To widespread consternation, not only did US officials refrain from taking any measures to ensure that the situation would not get out of control, they also decided to interrupt their "good offices" in the region.

Washington, the optimists suggested, considered that it would be more useful to intervene "in the heat of the moment", after the violence exploded. A less cordial interpretation, which recent events seem to confirm, is that President Clinton, weakened with respect to his Republican adversaries and the Jewish "lobby", opted for passivity without measuring the *risks he was taking.*

Is this ignorance or arrogance on the part of the sole global superpower? It is difficult to decide, when one considers that the stakes imply much more than just spilling Jewish and Arab blood. It should be obvious that terrorism is but a symptom, and can only be treated if the ill that causes it is cured. It should also be clear that terrorism — apart from its terrifying inhumanity — can ignite a powder-keg in the Occupied Territories, and perhaps even beyond, and that, at the very least, it promotes tensions which threaten the stability of a number of Arab countries, first *among them Jordan, which is particularly sensitive to* events taking place in the Territories.

Because it is incapable of acting, or merely too self-confident, the US has accepted these risks. Graver still is its failure to realise that the "peace process" it started can only sustain and amplify the danger of coming catastrophes. What is the alternative, if we continue to ignore UN resolutions, the fundamental principle of Madrid and Oslo, the terms of the Geneva Convention, which clearly prohibit the colonisation of occupied territories, and the international conventions which condemn, as violations of human rights, collective sanctions inflicted on entire populations, guilty and innocent alike? For much less, South Africa under apartheid was boycotted by the international community. At the time, the US found it easy to defend international law and human rights.

The acme of hypocrisy, then, would be to hold Yasser Arafat entirely responsible for terrorist activities. It is only to be expected that Netanyahu would seek to do so in order to exonerate himself, but it is shocking that President Clinton should fall into step shamelessly. The Israeli security services, which have earned their reputation, were never able to eradicate terrorism, either before or after Oslo. It is well known that they are omnipresent throughout the Territories, including Zone A, which is theoretically under exclusive PNA control.

Nor is Washington ignorant of the fact that Netanyahu's security agents were incapable of preventing Hamas kamikaze fighters from walking into West Jerusalem and blowing themselves up in an area which, precisely because it is a prime target, is heavi*ly guarded by the Israeli police.*

Most astonishing of all is that the all-powerful US was not even capable of taking a neutral stance, by declaring, for example, that a long hiatus in the peace process opened the door to violence. This would have allowed it to avoid a head-on collision with its ally, while protecting Yasser Arafat's credibility. To pressure Arafat to eradicate terrorism in collaboration with the occupier, although this aim cannot be achieved in the present state of affairs, is the most effective way of discrediting him entirely in the eyes of his people and, in the same blow, of paving the way for all forms of extremism. Is this what the US wants?

The problem, of course, is not one of intentions. US aims, no doubt beyond reproach, are unfortunately masked by the superpower policy the Americans insist on implementing the Middle East, although they are not really able to do so. In theory, the influence and even the hegemony they exercise in the region should make it possible to impose a settlement acceptable to both parties to the conflict — in other words, a lasting settlement. But in practice, the balance of power with*in the US political system prevents it from playing the* role of an "honest broker". This bias condemns the US to failure.

This is also the Europeans' opinion. Europe has often expressed the desire to contribute to the peace process, by offering the US the counterweight it lacks within American society. As early as the Venice Declaration, issued in June 1980, the European Union adopted a balanced position, strictly based on the principles established by the United Nations, without questioning the existence and security needs of Israel, contrary to the allegations made by Israeli leaders. In the quest for a solid peace, the only guarantee of their interests in the region, the Europeans repeatedly assured their trans-Atlantic allies that they had neither the intention nor the means to undermine US influence in the region, let alone offer a substitute.

Europe, the Arab world and the United Nations, in fact, are capable of filling a major gap in the Israeli-American concept of the peace process, by setting clear, tangible objectives which may be summed up in a few words: the evacuation of the Occupied Territories, and the Palestinians' right to self-determination. All the ramifications of these goals would then be negotiable. The failure of the Oslo Accords is essentially due to the lack of clearly defined perspectives, which makes this conflict unique in the annals of similar colonial struggles. No doubt, the Oslo Accords were useful to the extent that they allowed a page of the conflict to be turned. Perhaps they were inevitable, given the impasse in which the Israeli Labour Party and the PLO found themselves. It remains, however, that this process was killed by the ac*cession to power of a coalition which surpasses all its* predecessors since the creation of Israel in terms of its confrontational nature.

How many more Israeli and Arab lives are to be counted before the international community finds the will and the courage to initiate a genuine land-for-peace process?

Translated from French by ***Pascale Ghazaleh***

To The Editor

The Americana way

Sir - I refer to the article published by Mr Gamal Essam El-Din in *Al-Ahram Weekly* of 31 July-6 August, under the heading "Putting Thugs Out of Business".

Unfortunately, several facts were misinterpreted and as such the article could be confusing to the reader. Therefore, we need to clarify and correct the following issues, in accordance with the provisions of Article 24 of Press Law 69 for 1969.

The well-established fact, abundantly supported beyond any doubt by all relevant government records (in particular police records and public prosecution office), is that Mr M. Al-Alfi has never been involved or connected, even in the remotest possible way, with any act of violence or hiring of any hooligans and thugs. It is established that the recourse to violence and hooligans was exclusively practiced by the other party, Mr Tarek Nour.

You announced that the dispute between the principal partners in APAA arose when Al-Kharafi Group decided to end its dealings with Tarek Nour. Actually, the dispute started when Tarek Nour tried to register the "Americana" trademark in his own name, although it has been wholly owned since 1963 and registered in Egypt since 1979 by the Kuwait Food Company-Americana, which holds 51 per cent of the shares. Mr Nour's presence in the Americana Promotion and Advertising Agency is based on the fact that Mr Al-Kharafi endowed him with 49 per cent of the shares of the company as a gift. By the end of 1995, it was discovered that Mr Nour committed serious financial violations while he was president of the company. He started establishing other businesses for himself by utilising Americana resources. As a result, the board of directors asked the general assembly of shareholders in September 1995 to move Mr Nour from chairmanship, without undertaking any legal action in this regard. But again, through mediation from Kuwait and Egypt, the issue was reconsidered and Mr Al-Kharafi was generous enough to forgive him. Unfortunately this did not put an end to his wrongdoings, and once again the dispute occurred. Mr Nour wanted to buy 51 per cent of the shares owned by Al-Kharafi group, but we explained to him that *it is the majority shareholders' right* to buy his 49 per cent shares. Then, in violation of all laws and rules, Nour applied to the Trademark Authority to register the Americana trademark in his name.

We want to clarify the ambiguity involved with the use of the word "Americana". The article portrayed the Americana Promotion and Advertising Agency as a company irrelevant to the Kuwait Food Company-Americana. The Americana Promotion and Advertising Agency is one of many companies owned by Al-Kharafi Group, who are the major shareholders. When the Kuwait Food Company-Americana elected to assign the Americana trademark to the Promotion and Advertising Agency, this was only intended as marketing support to facilitate launching its activities in the Arab and Gulf region, capitalising on customers' knowledge of the "Americana" trademark and our image of excellence in the region. The Americana trademark is registered internationally, has been in use for over 35 years and enjoys the stability of other international trademarks. Egyptian law acknowledges and defends the rights associated with a trademark, and therefore we advised Nour to withdraw his application to the Trademark Authority, but he refused, claiming that he was backed by high officials.

Therefore, we called a board meeting, to be held on 10 July, in order to discuss these issues. Mr Nour, as *the chairman*, was of course invited, but he did not attend. Nour presumed that the board convened as planned on 10 July, and that a resolution was passed to move him from chairmanship. Building on his presumptions, he therefore had to conceal the financial documentation that condemns him. Therefore, on the following day (11 July), Nour, through his deputy Heba Ghazala, hired a group of hooligans who went to the building and seized the key to the main gate by force from the house guard. The house guard phoned our security manager for help, who in turn immediately sought police intervention. The police went to the location and were fiercely attacked by the hooligans. When one of the police officers dashed into a nearby barber shop to call for extra forces and protection, one of the hooligans followed him, badly injured him and murdered the poor barber, who was trying in vain to explain that they were attacking the policemen and wanted to protect one of them by closing his shop.

All the official police reports and depositions indicate that the hooligans, who were then arrested, were hired by Mrs Heba Ghazala, Mr Nour's deputy, and that one of them is a relative of Mr Nour. The police reports are available should any further verification be needed.

Given the above, I cannot understand why Mr Nour still insists on presiding over the company. If he *feels that his resignation could* be a solution, then what is he waiting for? Why allow Mr Nour to preside over a company which should be one of the biggest in the Arab world, but has not achieved this position so far, due to his violations and malpractice? How can we let him preside over the company, which he wants to register under his own name, although the trademark belongs to Al-Kharafi Group?

Mohamed Hassanein
Legal counsel
to Al-Kharafi Group
Cairo

A triumph for democracy

By Abdel-Jawad Saleh

The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has made history on its long journey to democracy. During its last session, some ministers wept; others found themselves being tried in a court set up by the Palestinian people, able to hold their leaders accountable for the first time in history. Palestinian democracy is in the making.

The principles of transparency, accountability and competence, the need for limitations on power as well as checks and balances on corruption, were all laid down by the PLC at its last session.

Ministers were reminded that the abuse of power is not permitted, but also that they had made a commitment to moral principles by which they must abide. The nightmare of occupation and its harsh circumstances, previously used as a justification for postponing reform, were disregarded. Accountability was reinstated.

One can neither confront an enemy nor deal with an ally in the absence of democracy. The Palestinians emphasised the *need to find new policies, attitudes* and ways of thinking. They refuse to postpone the solution to their problems *ad infinitum*. I believe that this is a watershed in our socio-political process of decision-making, as well as a victory for objective thinking; others may not agree with this perspective. Although the calling to account of the Cabinet opens up new horizons of possibility for democratisation, the path will be long and arduous. Only full mobilisaton of the people's capacities will do, if *we are to create an oasis of Palestinian democracy.*

The most recent battle established an important precedent. I see it as a launching pad in the long process of democratisation. The pioneers of the PLC should think of completing the process they have started. They will need to work hard to separate the judiciary from the executive branch, implement the principles of accountability, and set up a system of checks and balances applying to the executive as a whole, including the president. The principle of impeachment should be endorsed.

When that happens, we will have earned the right to be proud of the fact that, under prolonged occupation, we succeeded in building a stable political system and ensuring the peaceful rotation of power. Only in this way will we end the occupation.

The writer is the Palestinian minister of agriculture.

Lurch into the street

David Blake lauds Salzburg's new production of Ligeti's *Le Grande Macabre*, and watches a voracious audience in Cairo

Le Grande Macabre; Gyorgy Ligeti; Opera in two acts from the play La Balade du Grand Macabre by Michel de Ghelderodes, Salzburg Festival, Grosses Festpielhaus, sung in English. London Philharmonic, Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor; Peter Sellars, director



Monday last in Salzburg saw the long awaited production of Ligeti's opera *Le Grande Macabre*. It has been produced twice before but without much success. The composer himself did not think much of these productions and so, in the grand arena of the Festpiel, with a team of celebrated and controversial helpers, the current production assumes more than passing significance. What will be the fate of *Le Grande Macabre*? At least it kicks off from the centre of the operatic madhouse of 1997.

Gerard Mortier, Salzburg's new father figure, has rescued the festival from the dusk of the gods, where it was left after the death of Karajan. Grandiose it was, but drowning beneath a panapoly of acadamic formalism. It had to be changed. Mortier has already been the target for many thrown stones but he has proved a successful revivifier.

Le grande Macabre is a tough nut, but then Mortier has a tough team around him. Peter Sellars is the producer. He has an enviable record for producing scandals that succeed. And with another prickly and abrasive artist, the Swede Esa-Pekka Salonen to conduct, the fur looks set to fly.

Le Grande Macabre, Ligeti's first full length opera, is hardly a cheery tale. The end of the world approaches as a rogue asteroid heads to earth on a collision course. There are two acts divided into a number of scenes. The effect is one of mayhem and general frenzy.

It happens nowhere specific, but in Breughal Land, a corrupted, superating country ruled over by a Pol Pottish-like, nasty old incubus called Nekrotzar. He is demon, money wizard, reaper and raper rolled into one — Le Grande Macabre himself, all that is left of authority in a crumbling world. We are all in it together, on death row, waiting for the inevitable, as the great incendiary gets closer.

Things rage and fume. The work steams through every sort of shameless absurdity, erotic, sentimental, necrophilic, repulsive, in and out of endless, brilliantly manipulated musical forms — trios, ostinatos, melismas, preludes, knocked about notes and motorcar horns, choral forms of sonic erosions melting away to leave nothing but dismay and high spirits. Everything is sent-up.

In the second act, after every imaginable form of terror and prostration has been perpetrated, nothing happens. Le Grande Macabre himself disintegrates in the absence of the collision, slipping obediently away as if following the orders of some power greater than himself. Everything is suspended, nothing gained or lost.

Le Grande Macabre begins with the awesome words of the requiem for the dead, "*Dies irae, dis illa, solvet seculum...*" leaves out *calamatatis et miseriae*...and goes on to finish with exaltation — "And when it comes then let it be, farewell till then live merrily." That's telling them. The whole grotty mess stays as it is. It is surreal. But then Mona Lisa probably did have a moustache, was probably a man anyway, otherwise Leonardo would not have painted her.

So far one thing has been left out — the music. And it is here where *Le Grande Macabre* really begins — with Ligeti. He is Hungarian, born near Budapest in 1923. *Le Grande Macabre* was first performed in Stockholm in 1978, though not to the composer's liking.

The wind around Kilmanjaro and the knockabout, impudent racket of the Peking Opera. Add to that rent shreds of wonderful, sad, violet coloured fugues, and you have Ligeti's out of this world music.

Ligeti left Hungary following the uprising of 1956 and is now an Austrian citizen, shuttling between Vienna and Paris. Musically, his mind seems set on universality. In *Le Grande Macabre* operetta, Offenbach, Verdi seen obliquely, each banner and every banner is raused. There are majestic farewells to grand opera that melt down into something tribal and before trickling away into absurdity. It lurches into the street, with piles of notes frothing and bursting. And it is any old city street. The end of *Le Grande Macabre* is cheery, rosy and poppy, a kick in the rear for Verdi's Falstaff.

Ligeti can make music out of anything. Love is a racket, and sounds melt but never die. Ligeti is wise, he welds heart and brain, the awful and disinherited, to make something witty, dishy and dreamy that anyone can feel.

Mohamed Mounir; Open Air Theatre, Cairo Opera House; 28 July

Tighten your defences. The impact when it comes may be frontal.

And when it came it was, though it came 45 minutes late. The wait was worth it.

Mounir is a dazzler. He shines, goes up and down like lights in the sky, but he never goes out. He is a reliable professional, a star. This means a lot to his admirers but even more to him. Being a star is irresistibly horrendous hard work. Those out front expect a heap full of thrills. They have paid for it, and they wait hungrily for the dish. They demolish the lot when it comes, plate and all.

This young, overdressed audience had an enormous appetite. Before the show began the atmosphere in the Open Air Theatre grew tenser and more charged as the minutes passed. The theatre filled to bursting. The men in the orchestra fidgeted about in their spots like nocturnal animals in a night zoo. The crowd grew more silent but restive, which was unnerving. At last, as the silence sort of screamed, up and out off the shadows on the side came he. Light of foot, he darted to centre stage, called out the title of a song, and the building trembled as the audience howled. The evening began.

Mohamed Mounir makes a striking picture on stage. He is tall, and thin as a reed. He has legs like Tommy Tune and long, Greek feet. He teeters rather than walks, a little unsteadily. But he never stays still. A bird, a sand hopper, taking queer small steps as if feeling his way over a swamp.

The face carries through the spaces. Even the eyes offer a message of intensity and often amusement. He is not a freezing, stuck-up star, nor an audience sucker. He is dignified when hopping, and dignified when making meat-cleaving gestures in the surrounding air. Everything about him appears to have been made to register with maximum effect. Even the teeth and the smile occupy theatrical space.

No need for a programme. This celebrity-sated audience knew everything. Tonight's band comprised Hazem Abdel-Kadr on drums, alongside two floating percussionists. But what matters in this instance is Mounir. He is the show, lock stock and barrel.

Mounir stretches his rock idiom with some afro, some folkloric, *something old and something new*. There is still something left in pop-rock, though not much. In this respect pop-rock occupies the same contemporary musical space as the classical repertoire.

Mohamed Mounir has rather cleverly staked his own area in which to work. That area is Egypt itself, and this is where the bones of the show really lie. They support him. There is a lot of feeling of stance, place and race in the sound. And it is a real sound. Mounir is more than just a singer who makes a huge noise through an amplifier that could compete with the end of the world. He has an idea, a sort of point of view, which has made him a style-setter for a generation. And he knows it.

He is into sport, football, the team, and we all love one another as we watch the kisses fly and he kicks his goals. As each song reaches its climax, the entire audience leaps into the air, screaming, wiggling and embracing each other, him and the night air. They know each song inside out, and greet each one with a varying degree of ecstasy. The ones they love most are about themselves. Indeed, they seem more wrapped up in themselves than in their star. There is a sort of fate they share with the songs. They are the songs he sings.

No one can sit still. Yet all efforts at audience participation are wisely quashed by the authorities. As the show proceeded, the crowd found other avenues of participation. Mounir, in his stride now, moved with demonic energy. It seemed his feet might give out if not the voice.

Mounir's is an overwhelmingly physical presence. And the audience, too, formed themselves into a kind of body, one with multiple heads but all thinking same. The songs themselves might have become a bore as the evening wore on were it not for the fact that the audience greeted each so eruptively. At times it was singalong, and the gang knew every turn of the music. And Mounir moved forward, driven always by the relentless sounds of his own city.

Mohamed Mounir's audience does an impressive job of achieving the mega-city stomp. The staging of his show involved large machines belching waves of smoke and flames with Mounir appearing in the midst like some god of flame. The crowd loved the tacky theatrics. *Stomp, stomp, stomp, and then* stomp again. And despite the tawdry machismo of it all there was really something quite touching. Mounir is limping now, and the voice is a trifle hoarse. Yet it remains impressive. Everyone loves him. The audience received their moment of release and happiness and then it is over. They get up and leave, as one.

***Le Grande Macabre*, Ligeti's (top) first full-length opera, has hardly the most cheering of subjects. Yet the end of the world emerges as both rosy and poppy, thanks to the composer's genius. Above, Mohamed Mounir, whose concert at Cairo Opera House provided his fans with a chance to stomp, stomp, stomp**

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Gamal Gad Mlelka
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.
Recent paintings and sculptures by the Egyptian artist now resident in Italy.

Ebada El-Zeheiry (Works in ink)
Donia Gallery, 30 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily noon-10pm. Until 14 August.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri. 10.30am-2pm. & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Tahiya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgoury, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgouri, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs. Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city. Elegant, airy, and with pleasant garden cafe.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon. 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

The Heart Within: Religion, Spiritual Heritage & Makoto, Sincerity of Heart
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 7 August, 6pm.
The Japanese Cultural Centre continues its screening of 30 minute documentaries. Films are in English.

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
7 August, 4.30pm: Mard
11 August, 4.30pm: Dostaana
The Indian Cultural Centre continues its summer season of Amitab Bachchan's films

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/392 5162/3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Before and After
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson.

101 Dalmatians
Ramsis Hilton, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel Hamid Said st., Downtown, Tel 575 8797
Glen Close as Cruella de Vil in Walt Disney's latest blockbuster.

Mars Attacks
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and Danny De Vito.

The Men They Couldn't Hang (see Music)

Liar Liar
El-Horreya, El-Horreya Mall, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
For one day attorney Jim Carrey can only tell the truth.

The English Patient
Odeon III, Abdel Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Willem Dafoe, Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche in the nine Oscar award-winning adaptation of Michaoel Oondjate's novel.

Two Much
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Antonio Banderas, Melanie Griffith and Daryl Hannah.

The Preacher's Wife
Odeon II, Abdel Hamid Said st., Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Whitney Houston.

Double Team
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Hazzemni Ya...
Cinema Cairo, Saray El-Azbekiyya, downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Fifi Abduh's belly-dancing his transferred to the screen.

Tuffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

The Woman and the Cleaver
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

MUSIC

The Men They Couldn't Hang
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 7-8 August 9pm.
Five piece British band. Tough, intense and instantly memorable music claims the British Council's publicity leaflets.

An Evening of Nubian Music
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 9 August, 9pm.
With composer/singer Karam Mourad.

An Evening of Jazz
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 10 August, 9pm.
With Yehia Khalil and his band.

Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 11 August, 9pm.
Mahmoud Osman leads the ensemble.

Song Recital
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 12 August, 9pm.
Amr Yehia and Akram El-Sharqawi.

New Pop
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 10 August, 9pm.
With Ali Sharaf.

THEATRE

Toqous El-Esharat Wel-Tahawolat (Rites of Signs and Transformations)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily. 9pm.
Scripted by Saadallah Wanis, directed by Hassan El-Wair, starring Nabil El-Halafawi, Sawsan Badr and Hamdi El-Wazir.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Bahloul Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm exc Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10 pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Fishawi and Ezzat El-Alayli; directed by Essam El-Sayed.

A'lim Guineadi (The World of Guineadi)
Small Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9pm.
Musical directed by Fawzi El-Melighi, score by Tarek Abbas.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Farce)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
Youssef Idris play revived with Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi; directed by Shaker Abdel-Latif.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yoghurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm, exc Mon & Fri, 8pm
Sayed Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Ta'm El-Kalam (The Taste of Words)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10 pm
Abdullah Mahmoud, Farouk Naguib and Manal Salama, directed by Hossam El-Din Saleh.

Malek Wala Kitabah (Heads or Tails)
Small Hall, El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 8pm
Mustafa Saad directs Medhat Morsi and Salwa Osman in his own play.

Leila Foul (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. For times check with venue.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

THE MUSEUM of Modern Egyptian Art, located in the grounds of the Opera House, is one of the most energetically run art institutions in Cairo. It is the only venue in Egypt where it is possible to trace the development of Egyptian art in the 20th century, from the early interest in modernism to contemporary works. Among the permanent collection is The Market Place, Ragheb Ayyab's (1892-1982) celebration of the organic nature of rural communities.



Ragheb Ayyad

Ayyab's influence on the course of modern Egyptian art was seminal — he taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts and included among his students are both Hamed Nada and Abdel-Hadi El-Gazzar. It is somehow appropriate then, that the last official post held by Ayyab was the directorship of The Museum of Modern Egyptian Art.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

The last classicist

The death of the Iraqi poet Mohamed Mahdi Al-Jawahri, at the age of 98, robs the Arab world of its last classicist, a poet often compared to Al-Mutanabi. Al-Jawahri's life spanned the present century, and he was a privileged witness to the upheavals that accompanied the creation of the modern Middle East.

Born in Najaf, then the provincial capital of an Ottoman province and for centuries the most distinguished centre of Shiite learning, Al-Jawahri died in Damascus, stripped of his Iraqi citizenship. His arrival in Baghdad in 1927 coincided with the emergence of modern Iraq, and for three years he was resident at the court of King Faisal I. He left the court following the publication, under a pen-name, of a love poem that offended King Faisal's older brother, Ali. The poem translated below was written shortly after Al-Jawahri's dismissal from court.

Al-Jawahri subsequently enjoyed a distinguished career, both as a parliamentarian, and as a publisher and editor. *Euphrates*, the newspaper he founded, served as a platform for his fiery invective, publishing its founder's poetry alongside his editorials. Until 1958, and the coming to power of Abdel-Karim Qassem, with whom he initially enjoyed a close relationship, his papers were regularly closed down. Yet the pattern of his relationship with Faisal was to repeat itself, and in 1960 Al-Jawahri was to find himself once again estranged from the ruler of Iraq.

In 1961 he left Iraq and spent most of the next decade in exile in Prague. He returned to Iraq in 1968, only to depart again for Prague three years later. The final years of his life were spent in Syria.

Zikriati (My Memories), a two-volume autobiography, was published in Damascus in 1991.



A lasting estrangement

Every poet is an exile, writes **Mourid Barghouti**, though few experience the relentless logic of that state as intensely as the Iraqi poet Mohamed Mahdi Al-Jawahri

Nothing compares to the melancholy of the Iraqi people. Look at their plaintive ballads and poetry linking us to the celebrated poets of the past, yet offering that creative rupture that brings Arab poetry into the realm of modernism, spurring it on with bursts of experimentation into places below which we see only blue clouds.

The first time I met Al-Jawahri he created that impression which I later learned he created for all his interlocutors. He imparted the sense that he lived in this world as though exempt from death, as though death were a joke he found in poor taste, a joke that had nothing to do with him. He walked confidently into his nineties, so alert, energetic and creative that we almost succumbed to the illusion. Here he is approaching a hundred, we said, as though in actual fulfillment of his claim to exemption. However, poetry is a metaphor for life, its dreams and its terror. The stainless steel illusion collapsed before the fact of death which has an affinity for rust.

Let us be frank now, Al-Jawahri. The game didn't go as you wanted. Evil outlasts the poet. "Short-lived" tyrants live on after the rhyme fades. Sorrow lasts longer than the plaintive Arab. Exile has a longer life span than the people exiled. The ache of longing outlives those who long. Estrangement lasts longer than the estranged.

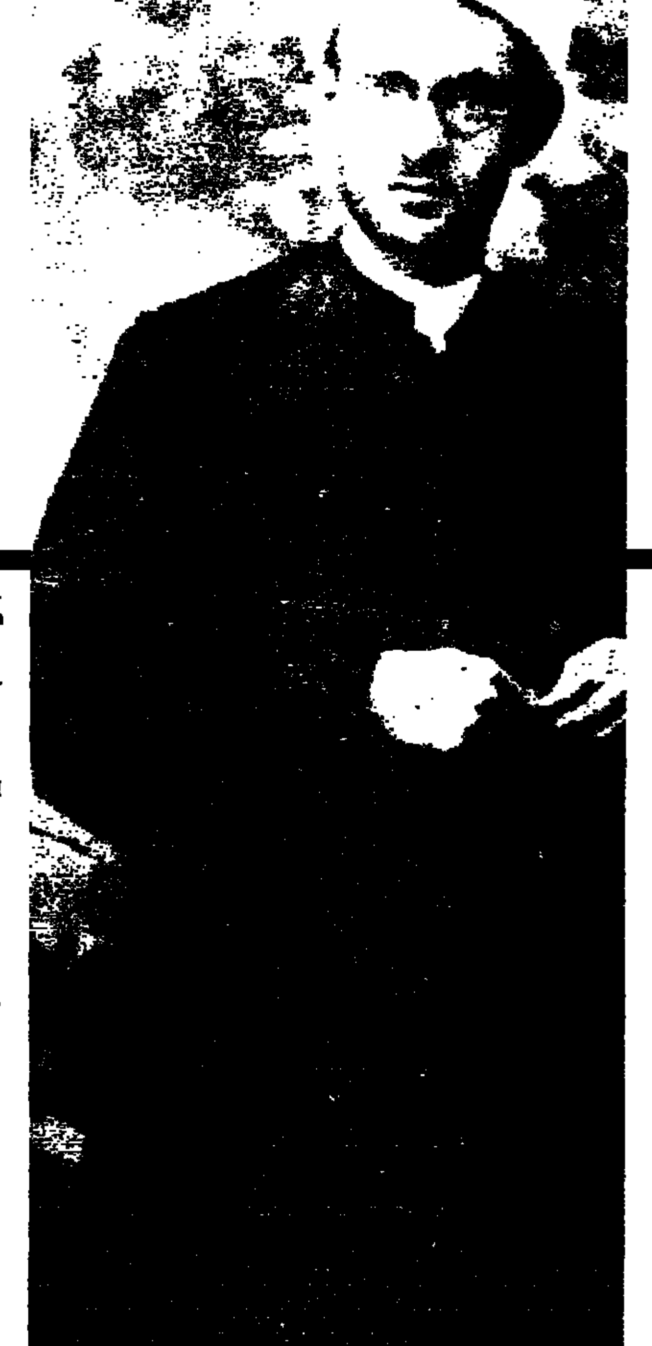
Does this apply only to us or to all humanity? For my part, I chose to believe the coffin, because I cannot swallow the ready-made formula: "He will never die, for he remains among us." You are dead. You died in exile, far from Iraq. Every poet is in exile. I will believe death. This is what I have learned from the history of loss. However, you have passed through this world and you have bequeathed it with the same clamour as Al-Mutanabi. You have completed a circle that no other future poet could complete. The shiver that once the love and fear of the poet engendered is now gone. Poetry is no longer the catalogue of nations, daily horrors, the battles of the mournful masses. The objectives of poetry, which do not exclude eulogising kings, have changed. You will not see our coming defeats, nor our future victories. (Indeed, will we see them ourselves?) And, you will not like the new poetry. However, between one victim and the next your tremulous, iron-clad voice will continue to resound:

"Do you or did you not know that the wound of the victims is an open mouth?"

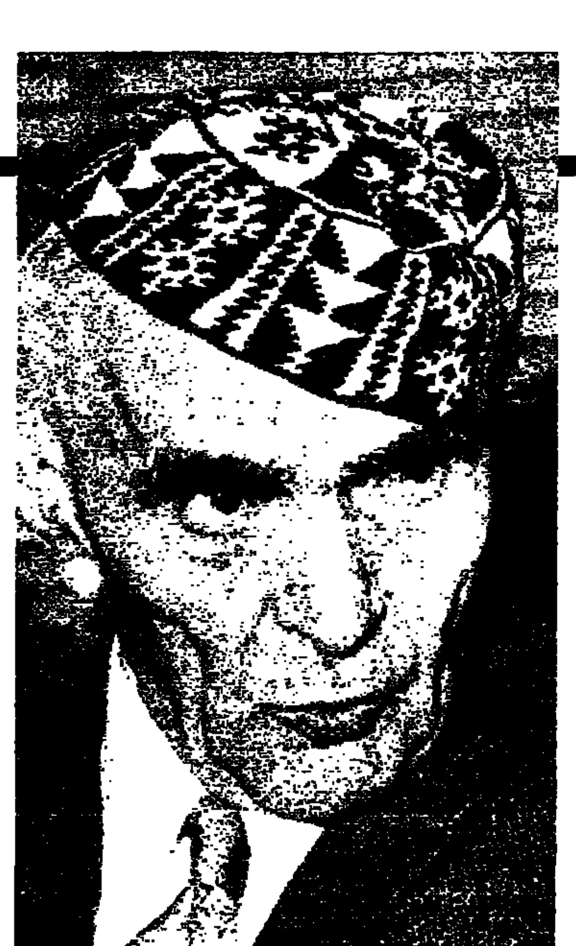
How sorely we will miss that voice. Your voice. The voice of an earthquake wearing a small, embroidered cap, tilted to the side.



Above, Al-Jawahri addresses demonstrators who took to the streets in 1948 to protest the Portsmouth Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which was subsequently abrogated. Below left, Al-Jawahri in his twenties, and in Cairo in 1971



"I entered my bleak house near the Haidarkhanah Mosque and began to write a poem... in the afternoon... I recited the poem from the roof of the mosque... No sooner had I reached the fourth line than Al-Rashid Street was full of crowds that blocked the traffic. Another demonstration had begun"



The purge, 1931

I attempted to open a way into life without success;/ now I am sorry that
I will be gone without leaving behind a reminder./
I am pained by the oft-recurring thought that I will go having bequeathed neither good nor bad./
Ten years have passed and my soul, filled with anger, is like a flood-tide that ran into an impenetrable wall./
I gained that sort of experience in life that had I become immortal I would not have been wiser./
Beholding that which I cherished was no different from being blind, and hearing what I loved to hear was like being deaf./ Misfortune placed an imprint on my face/ and discord left my liver boiling./ If you look into my eyes, you'll find them shrunk/ and my face has become a forgery of my image./
Can't you see that doubts and suspicions have so consumed me/ that I behold all, even my friends, red-eyed with anger?/
I was forced to wear the guise of foxes./ to disguise a soul created to be an eagle./
I flatteringly patted the rear-end of pigeons./ brought down hawks from their lofty summits./
And came back with a chest full of grudge and gall/ and with empty hands that were denied their expectations./
I endured the harm which was inflicted upon me because I was forced to./ although a free man should not succumb to necessity/.
He is not a free man who seeks an object/ but fears that hardship will be its consequence/
And you cannot give rebellion its due/ if you are wary of hunger or nakedness./
What else would you expect from a nation/ aspiring for a major revolt against its conditions/
Time, armed with all its misfortunes, closed on me/ as if it mistook me for the Caesar of Rome or the King of Persia./
A single one of its misfortunes should have been enough;/ it was extravagance that misfortunes came in quick succession/
It advanced in my direction, like an effeminate man hiding behind his shield./ for a head-on collision with a bare chest, a bleeding horn./
Assisted by no one, for my only support/ is patience, and he whose companion is patience is lonely indeed./
My only guilt was that whenever Time proved bountiful./ I was not vociferous with gratitude/
I did not deem the little it bestowed adequate/ and did not view its meagre gifts as plenty./
My ambition represented everything that I achieved./ even if it had a lofty status, as falling short of my expectations./
I milked the two udders of Time, scrutinising each./ but was not thankful to the one which was more bountiful than the other./
In both cases, I was fed fortune and misfortune/ and, in both cases, I suffered what ruined my intoxication./
I was given wine and drinking companions and yet I was angry/ because I was not given a kingdom or a palace./
And had they been my lot, I would have remained angry/ with Time for withholding some other object./
And so Time re-took possession of its good gifts/ and also showed me that I have not experienced the taste of bitterness yet./
I was punished for my ambition and now./ contrary to my heart's desire, I have neither wine nor friends./
People may gloat but I am not/ the first to have been taken by surprise and deception./
Voracious creatures may devour my flesh, but it was only after/ I trusted them that they revealed their teeth and claws./
Grievances kindle my rhyme with fire/ and rage and my hot liver is frying. /
Whenever I was cross with Time, I improvised/ verse whose scorching lines unleashed live coals./
Like Ziad who, fed up/ and frustrated, made a speech in which he did not offer thanks to God./
Or Al-Mutanabi who said grumblingly:/Wake up for the hangover of worries has made wine hateful to my taste./
Yet, I am still this man who is trying to improve his times/ and conditions although all other people have proved infidel/
I have seen man driven by tyrannical arrogance/ to commit shameful acts to which a ferocious beast would not stoop./
The beast would be tempted to devour its prey/ but Man will love to torture it first/
There are proud men whose souls are filled with suppression/ and there are free women who complain because poverty is all around them/
Let him be happy he whose usefulness, when he is alive, is felt by no one/ and, when he dies, nobody would know the way to his grave/
Do you know what he does in secret, the man/ who wears the spectacles of arrogance, watching others with conceit and condescension./
Scrutinising the crowds to show off/ that he is smarter or richer./
Although his only distinction is that/ he is good at dancing and playing the fool,
And he who keeps one hand in his pocket/ while the other fondles his mustache haughtily./
Though, if his pockets were searched, /they would have been found crammed with deformities.
And he who, though he lives in the prime of plenty./ is seen carrying around a face yellow with grudge./
And he who, if people liked his words./ would strut around to show them that he is about to conquer Egypt./
And he who is glorified by a certificate/ testifying that the boy has read one line./
It would take you a mere hour to test him/ and conclude that he still lacks experience./
Even assuming that he was inspired with all knowledge/ and was able to analyse the indivisible jewel as well as the dust that is blown away/
And Shakespeare was the servant of his poetry/ and the languages of the universe the servants of his prose./
Must I bow to him/ and must my knees shake whenever he passes by,
Doesn't this "star" who has no peer know/ that just as he was born free, all others are free men/
My residence in Iraq is cursed. Perhaps./ when my departure is finally decided, it will be worth praising/

Translated by ***Wadie Kirolos***

Plain Talk

I have just finished reading *New Writing 6*, an anthology of contemporary writing in English published by Vintage in association with the British Council. This annual collection of essays, short stories, poems and extracts from novels in progress provides a convenient overview of the best of recent literary production for the lay reader who may not have access to newly published titles.

Flicking through *New Writing 6* I came to realise two things. The most shocking realisation was just how out of touch I have become with the literary scene in the UK. Fortunately, though, the current volume fills at least some of the gaps and provides a tantalising glimpse of the diversity of new writing. It serves as a primer, introducing new names to the reader who is more than likely to supplement their personal libraries with full-length works by the writers included.

The anthology is edited by A S Byatt, a leading novelist, and Peter Porter, the distinguished poet. Strangely enough, I recently came across an article by Byatt as I was perusing the Arts and Books supplement of the *Daily Telegraph*. In 'When narrative power knows no bounds' Byatt examines Europe's "burgeoning love affair with English novels." According to Byatt, the recent commercial success of translations of English novels in Europe has been underwritten by a thorough market strategy that has included a carefully considered analysis of the diverse moods and tastes of the reading publics in European countries.

Byatt draws an insightful comparison between the current state of French and English writing. The French, of course, have always exhibited a degree of chauvinism in the defence of their cultural life, the latest emanation of which is the insistence on including a cultural exception clause in the GATT agreements. Even so, a great many English contemporary novels have been translated into French. The phenomenon was, indeed, the subject of a recent supplement published by *Le Figaro*. In the introduction to the supplement English writers were criticised as "non-revolutionary, slippered by the fireside, happy not to overthrow their forefathers (Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope), but to learn from them."

The introduction continues, accusing the British of avoiding theory like the plague. It concludes that most British writers are content merely to produce good novels. Unlike the French, the British appear not to believe in genius, novelty and artistic subversion. This, the writer of the introduction believes, is a function of working within a genre that is very much still rooted in tradition. This has allowed English writers to remain open "to the questions posed by modern life and influences from outside, from other cultures, while avoiding a dry and boring solipsism."

Byatt concludes that French fiction since the fifties has had "the virtues of style, elegance, of artistic subversion, and has rejected the narrative power of Balzac and Proust." The British, on the other hand, "are telling a good story in Europe partly because British writers are good citizens of Europe and the world."

I know that I have digressed from *New Writing 6*, the subject of this Plain Talk. Let me get back then to the volume in question. One of the most interesting features is that the editors have for several years now included not just the works of British nationals, but of all writers who use the English language as their medium of communication. This allows the anthology a certain internationalism, and the editors have obviously been very keen to avoid any hint of parochialism. It is a policy that has and continues to pay rich dividends. Indeed, *New Writing 6* constitutes an exemplary celebration of plurality and diversity, providing a platform for a multiplicity of voices, many of which have only their shared language of expression in common.

Mursi Saad El-Din

When strong men ruled

Violence and hooliganism is on the rise, writes Fayza Hassan, and it is tempting to find solace in stories of the good old days, when strong men were not vulgar thugs, but flexed their muscles in defence of the legitimate rights of their communities, and watched over the downtrodden, the poor and the needy

Long ago, life in the popular quarters (*ahya'*) of the large Egyptian cities was strictly ordered by traditions and a specific code of behaviour, a set of rules imposed from within, which aimed at establishing the authority of one individual over the others: this man (the strongman or *fetewa*) was required to keep the peace in his domain, defend the weak and the needy, protect the honour of women and generally resolve internal disputes without any police interference. Another important duty of the strongman was to keep bandits and hooligans away.

A community whose *fetewa* had earned himself the respect of his neighbours and of the *fetewas* of adjoining quarters prospered: its members could go about their business in peace. If, on the other hand, the *fetewa* was weak or unfair, other *fetewas* from inside his own area or from the adjoining neighbourhood would try to unseat him, thus provoking violent battles which often ended up in tragedies.

The *fetewa* was chosen by the people as their leader, or imposed himself as the strongest man in the quarter, able to keep the peace in communities where the police were loathe to interfere. Having grown up in the area, he was acquainted with all the inhabitants and could identify the various interests at play. It is said that in many cases the police depended on the help of *fetewas* to defuse particularly ticklish situations.

Until the end of the 1940s, when their activities were curtailed and finally forbidden, the *fetewas* were a political force to be reckoned with. In particular, they are linked with Egypt's struggle for independence, and many accounts of their skirmishes with the British occupants are now legendary. Many stories about their role in harassing the British troops around the Canal and the instrumental role they played in organising the popular resistance in Ismailia still provide entertainment and excitement, as well as a measure of how good the good old days really were.

When the *fetewa* was not waging guerrilla warfare on the occupation forces, he attempted to act as the absolute ruler of his people. In principle, his word was never to be disobeyed, unless one was looking for trouble. The *fetewa* was king of his castle (or rather his *hay*), and visitors who ventured into his domain could only do so with his permission. Traditionally, processions, weddings or funerals could not pass through a *hara* without having secured the permission of the reigning *fetewa* first. Had celebrants or mourners been bold or foolish enough not to do so, more often than not, the event soon turned into a bloodbath.

Amm Saad manages a small, very inexpensive hotel in the Clot Bey area. His father managed the hotel before him and Saad was born in the house. He remembers that, as a small boy, he used to see their *fetewa*, *Amm* Gaafar, sitting at a small table in the café across the street. Clot Bey was Cairo's red-light district at the time, and part of its *fetewa's* duties was to protect the working women there. When *fetewas* from other quarters wished to visit the district, the polite way was to send word to *Amm* Gaafar in advance. He then made arrangements and "treated his visitors really well."

Once, reminisces Saad, a *fetewa* from El-Hussainiya district forgot to perform this little ritual. "Maybe he was new at his job, or maybe he had no manners. He arrived, surrounded by his men, and sat at a café, casually surveying the street." El-Hussainiya's *fetewas* were reputed to be the most ferocious of all. An ordinary citizen would never have dared to cross their path, but within minutes *Amm* Gaafar had been informed. "He arrived with his men, all wearing their best caftans and woolen scarves and carrying their sticks," says *Amm* Saad. "They made quite an impression, filing solemnly down the street. They headed for the stranger silently. His men, a bit unsettled at the ominous sight of a whole army descending upon them, moved closer to their chief, but *Amm* Gaafar shooed them away with his stick. He then stood in front of the intruder and stared at him without saying a word," continues *Amm* Saad, smiling at the memory of the performance, which he obviously enjoyed tremendously."

Amm Gaafar just looked at the *fetewa* who had dared to enter his 'house' without his prior permission. He looked at him long and hard. Finally, satisfied, he called the café owner: 'The bill, please' he bellowed for everyone in the street to hear: 'the gentlemen are leaving.' From the pocket of his caftan, he extracted a large black purse and, taking a few bills out, threw them on the table. He turned around and walked up the street, followed by his men, not even looking back to see the other group leave in a hurry."

According to Saad, however, *Amm* Gaafar was a generous, peace-loving man and, once the right procedure had been followed, he always made sure that his fellow *fetewas* from other quarters were treated right in the red-light district.

Another "sacred" duty of the *fetewa* or clan chief, was to protect the weaker members of the community: widows, children and the handicapped. Traditionally, he helped provide for them and often collected "dues" from the rich for their sustenance. In this role, the *fetewa* could be considered the Egyptian equivalent of Robin Hood, by definition honourable, courageous and honest, endowed with superior strength, both physical and moral.

In *El-Harafish*, Naguib Mahfouz describes the stringent rules Ashur El-Nagi, leader of the *harafish* (riff-raff), applies to his own son: "When Ashur saw him [his son Shams El-Din, decked out in the new clothes bought with the bonus offered to him by the owner of the caravanserai, Ashur's enemy], he grabbed him by his collar and marched him into the basement, then struck him so hard that his head spun. 'They'll use your weakness to get at me'... he shouted. He made him take the clothes back to the shop and return the bonus. Shams El-Din realised that he was powerless in the face of his father's anger."



From time to time, the leader was challenged by a younger member of the community, who felt stronger, fairer in his judgement and in all ways better equipped to defend the territory. The custom was for old and new *fetewas* to fight it out, each surrounded and supported by his men. No one has recounted this dramatic changing of the guard better than Naguib Mahfouz:

"In the vast wilderness of the Mameluke Desert... Ghassan approached, surrounded by his men, and stood face to face with Dahshan and his supporters. Eyes met under the burning sun, tortured by the fierce blaze of heat rising from the sun. The surrounding emptiness looked on coldly, mockingly, without pity, promising the loser eternal ruin.

"It occurred to Shams El-Din that neither side had asked him to join them or sought his mother's blessings. On the cruel field of battle, women and inexperienced youth were irrelevant.

"Shaalan the One-Eyed came and stood beside him. Once a clan chief himself, in his old age he acted as arbitrator, impartial and reliable. He announced, 'The contest between Ghassan and Dahshan will begin. Let every man present remember his duty.' He gestured warningly and carried on, 'Keep to your places, abide by the result. Going against it means disaster for all... May the best man win. Everyone will owe him allegiance, including the loser'...

"Shaalan turned to Ghassan: 'Do you swear to submit if you are defeated?'

'I swear as God's my witness,' said Ghassan.

'And you, Dahshan?'

'I swear as God's my witness.'

'A touch is enough to decide the winner. Avoid violence at all cost. It only causes ill feeling'."







photos: Randa Shaath

SUMMER, EGYPTIAN-STYLE: In the summer swelter, catching a breeze is not necessarily a matter of means. Those unable to make it out of Cairo can paddle on the Corniche to sultry tunes when the sun goes down; in Ras El-Bar, ice-cream vendors resist the temptation of devouring their wares before they melt; and in Sharm El-Sheikh, dedicated aerobicisers don't mind donning their bikinis while getting into shape



To Eeyore, with love

Few creatures are more pathetic than Egyptian donkeys. For years, I have avoided Marsa Matrouh because their open sores have inscribed themselves indelibly on the landscape. Anyone who confesses to having ever taken a *caretta* ride in this summer resort, famous for its donkey carts, automatically becomes an enemy.

Marsa Matrouh, however, is by no means the only place where one can be an eyewitness to the torture inflicted on donkeys. In Maadi, the sight of smelly carts, overflowing with household garbage, drawn by a couple of moribund bags of bones and led by one or two little children, the eldest never more than twelve years old, are a daily spectacle offered to the expatriate community partial to this suburb, as living proof that at least one brand of Orientalism is alive and well. They certainly find something to write home about here. How do they describe this particular scene to their friends and families back in the motherland? I often wondered, until, recently, I inadvertently glimpsed a letter the woman sitting next to me on the metro was writing to a friend at home. Actually, I took a good, long glimpse, and before I knew it, I had read through to the end.

"Dear Julie," she wrote, "from my window, I can observe the garbage collectors with their quaint home-made little carts: just a few pieces of wood nailed together in a haphazard way, mounted on wheels of different sizes picked up separately in some dump, no doubt. The unequal size of the wheels accounts for the terrible din these carts produce when the drivers charge down the streets in mad races, spilling trash as they go.

"I was told the garbage collectors had received new carts and a lot of organisations have set up income-generating projects, but I guess not everyone has benefited from these. The children in charge of the collection are so dirty that it is hard to determine their sex or see their features clearly. A couple of scrawny donkeys drag the cart but they look like extras in a horror movie, with festering wounds covered with flies. The donkeys are obviously on their last leg, but it appears that the children expect to get some extra mileage out of them if they whip them hard enough. The whipping is accompanied by a great deal of oral abuse and the children often fight with each other for the privilege of beating the donkeys. Stray cats and dogs jump on and off the cart, trying to find a discarded tidbit, competing with the children, who always proceed to a quick preliminary examination of the garbage bags they have collected, throwing whatever they deem unsuitable for reuse back into the street.

"Sometimes one of the donkeys lies down and refuses to get up, whereupon the children take turns in whipping him. The other day, I decided to drive into town. It was a bad idea, because on my way back, the traffic had ground to a standstill on the bridge. The reason was that one of two donkeys harnessed to a garbage cart had collapsed, right there on the bridge. The driver was whipping the poor animal as usual, but the more the boy whipped, the less the donkey reacted.

"I noticed that he had drawn his hind legs up against his belly. I stopped my car, of course, and tried to explain to the boy that his donkey was very ill. But you know, I have just started my Arabic lessons and could not remember the words for ill or dying. So I just screamed at him to stop, but he just laughed and said "hallo, hallo" in a piercing voice while kicking the donkey in the shins. I really don't know why these donkeys don't kick back!

"Well, I did. I grabbed the whip, broke it into several pieces and threw it away, then began to pummel the boy on the back to make him stop. He turned around, surprised, and I slapped him hard. He just laughed. 'Police, I'll call the police,' I screamed, holding him by the scruff of his neck and shaking him with all my might. After a while I stopped, because my arm had started to hurt and the boy obviously did not understand why I was so incensed.

"Two men approached us and one of them pointed to my car and said something in Arabic to the boy, who shook his head. Another man came towards us. 'Did you hit the donkey with the car?' he asked in broken English. 'I did no such thing,' I shouted indignantly. 'This man says he saw you hit the donkey,' he said calmly, pointing to the boy. 'Go, or there will be trouble.' I refused to budge.

"The boy seemed unwilling to carry on the charade. He was more interested in getting the donkey back on its feet. The traffic was heavy and, every time he pushed the animal, the screech of brakes could be heard, the drivers barely missing the poor donkey. No one stopped, so they must be used to such scenes. I wanted to say that I would buy the donkey, but I didn't. What does one do in a crowded city with a donkey — dead or alive? I could not think of a practical answer.

"I walked back to my car, followed by the man who, having failed to implicate me in the donkey's woes, was now trying to be friendly. Driving off, I desperately wished I was home in Minneapolis, with you."

Love, Debby

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Oriental beef goulash

Ingredients:

1kg beef chuck steak (trimmed and cut into cubes)
2 large onions (sliced)
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1 tbsp. plain white flour
1/4 cup tomato paste
1 cup red wine
1 1/2 cups beef stock
6 tsp. ground sweet paprika
2 tbsp. corn oil
Salt+pepper+allspice+ground nutmeg

Method:

Heat oil in a heavy-based cooking pan. Gently fry the onions and garlic until golden. Add meat to pan in batches. Cook until well browned. Return all meat cubes to pan. Add the paprika and flour. Cook, stirring for 1 minute. Stir in tomato paste, red wine and stock. Season and bring mixture to boil, stirring constantly. Reduce heat, simmer covered until meat is tender. Serve on a bed of pasta, noodles or rice, with a rich green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The great glass elevator

Andrew Steele ascends to heaven

Up, up, up we go, first stop finery. There is a wealth of finery to be found at Kandahar in Midan Sphinx: the delirious comestibles of the sub-continent, authentic decor, slick service. All combine to titillate and please. You have, no doubt, seen the elevator. It's as glassy and brassy as they come and slithers up the outside of the building to deposit its contents opposite a beaming sari-clad hostess who discreetly enquires, in dulcet tones, "Indian or Lebanese?"

Ushered past an engraved fountain festooned with devotional flowers, one enters the airy elegance that *is* Kandahar. Our table was one of those with a view, a view that contrives to make Mohandessin at night look glamorous.

The Oberoi chain, that runs the establishment, has obviously lavished much love and affection on the interior. Some fine examples of Moghul-style furniture serve as counters, classical Indian miniatures share wall space with painted wooden frescoes and ornate mirrors. The greenery is for real — always reassuring.

Be warned, the menu is extensive. We had a devil of a time choosing, bedazzled by the vast array. Fortunately, the drinks were prompt and the waiter hovered attentively, and at a prudent distance, so that when those crucial decisions had been made a mere raising of the eyebrow summoned him thither.

'Cover', depending on the venue, can vary from a day-old roll and a pat of rancid butter, to the giddy bites that Kandahar proffers. Crisp and toothsome vegetable samosas, lime and mint chutneys along with a dish of those little red onions met with barely concealed whoops of approval. Authentic was the word that continually came to mind throughout our repast, which is only to be expected with such distinguished Indian ownership.

A starter is not really necessary then, unless one is particularly ravenous, so we devoured the 'cover' and waited, to the twangy thudding of tabla music, for the arrival of the main course. The *gosht khada maslala* was rather hot, the lamb tender and boneless, the gravy red and thick. The *murgh jalfareizi* was equally competent. The chicken, rich from a savoury marinade of coriander and *garam masala*, was stir-fried with onions and bell peppers.

I have always been a little biased towards vegetarian food, if it's good, and the potato and lentil dishes here were food as art, no more, no less. The *jeera aloo* comprised cubes of the most delightfully waxy potato, boiled and tossed in ghee, along with toasted cumin seeds and minced coriander. The *Kandahari daal* was as black as it tasted, and taste it did. It had that glorious smoothness that tells one it has been simmering for an awfully long time, imbued with a gorgeous blend of the most exotic of spices. It was the *daal* that dreams are made of. The *naans* were moist and flaky and, treat of treats, featured oodles of popadums, so ominously lacking in most of the capital's Indian outlets. All was kept splendidly warm by those natty 'Roller Grill' hot plates.

Need I go on? Have I lavished enough praise? Barely. I unreservedly recommend the Kandahar. It's simply delightful, and not as expensive as one would think with a, shall we say, competitive bill of LE200 for three with two Stella Exports and an orange juice. Go there.

Kandahar, 3 Gamaat El-Duwal El-Arabiya St. Midan Sphinx, Mohandessin. Tel: 3030615

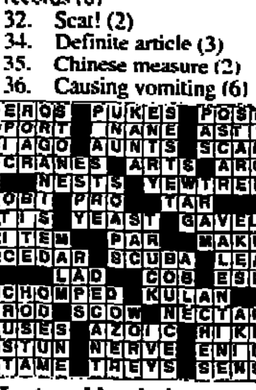
Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Breathless; on tenterhooks (4)
5. Rhythmical stress (5)
10. Arab judge (4)
14. Behind time (4)
15. Strong point (5)
16. Exp. Denoting lamentation (4)
17. Nictitate (5)
19. Decorticate (4)
20. Indian princess (4)
21. Trustiness; fortification (8)
23. Ordeals; physical or mental distresses (5)
24. Worn by 20 Across (4)
25. Fact; assumption (5)
27. Weather directions (3)
30. Memorabilia: historical records (8)
32. Scat! (2)
34. Definite article (3)
35. Chinese measure (2)
36. Causing vomiting (6)
38. God of War (4)
40. Doomed person, sl. (5)
41. For fear that (4)
42. Polygonal vault; bell tower (6)
43. Then (2)
46. Supped (3)
47. Abbreviation of weight measure (2)
48. Heartrending (8)
51. Young man (3)
52. Essential; principal (5)
53. Roster (4)
55. Pungent (5)
57. Artificial cave in chalk, hyph. wds (8)
61. Regrets bitterly (4)
62. Rack and ruin (4)
64. Mortise projection (5)
65. Part of Q.E.D... (4)
66. Permit (5)
68. Vitriolic (4)
69. Benefaction; baksheesh (4)
70. Unit of length (5)
71. Cozy places (4)

DOWN
1. White vestments worn over cassocks and amices (4)
2. Windstorm (4)
3. Relating to ears (4)
4. Kind (5)
5. R. Kipling's poem (2)
6. Pertaining to some Egyptian (6)
7. A playing card (4)
8. A N.A. Indian tribe (3)
9. French for "salt" (3)
10. Merry-go-round (8)
11. Frighten (5)
12. A north European (4)
13. Mother of Horus; moon goddess (4)
18. South African village (5)
22. Water (8)
23. Originate (4)
25. Roman 501 (2)
26. Hostility (8)
27. Pile (5)
28. Show disdain; dismiss from one's thoughts (5)
29. Boohoo; whine (4)
31. Therefore (5)
32. Scene; prospect; outlook (5)
33. Performed (5)
37. Small freshwater duck (4)
39. Fallacious quibblers (8)
43. Put down (4)
45. Composition for eight instruments (5)
49. High frequency, abb. (2)
50. Shudder (6)
52. Pomade; choicest (5)
54. Towards the front (5)
55. Region (4)
56. Spiral; twist and turn (4)
57. Dunce (4)
58. One time (4)
59. Anatomical name for part of the body (4)
60. Goals (4)
62. Water barrier (3)
63. Spanish cheer (3)
67. Personal pronoun (2)



Last week's solution



with love

Fayza Hassan



Portrait of a suburban commuter

Just before hopping off at the wrong station, cartoonist and painter George Bahgory **tells us, in words and drawings, of the enchanted, claustrophobic and disoriented existence of the Paris suburban expatriate**



The train. This old friend, a daily fixture of my life, rolls into the station in a cloud of proverbial smoke. An unequal relationship: I wait for the train each day; the train never waits for me. I climb to the upper level of the train. With me surges a motley collection of suburbanites. Many, like me, are foreigners.

First encounters always inspire romance. When I first moved out into my suburb, the train was an experience, a revelation. Every little town along the way was a discovery. Small lakes, forests, and dwellings, old and new, lined the tracks, beckoning an inquisitive glance.

But years have gone by and the magic has faded away, beauty transformed into drudgery by the inexorable march of time. Today, I am a prisoner of the suburban train.

I take my seat, facing backwards as though turning my back on my friend and tormentor, and the sleepy suburb recedes before my eyes. The train gravitates toward the city, as if drawn by an allure never to be fulfilled. I study the faces of my fellow suburbanites. On my lap sits my sketchbook, its blank spaces waiting to be filled. As the train races along, my pencil picks up speed. Scribbles turn into faces, impressions into words. Nameless faces appear in my book, anonymity both the sanctuary and prison of the urban commuter. Suddenly, thirty-five minutes of incarcerated monotony into Paris are metamorphosed into a delight, the boredom melting away as shapes vie for space in my sketchbook.

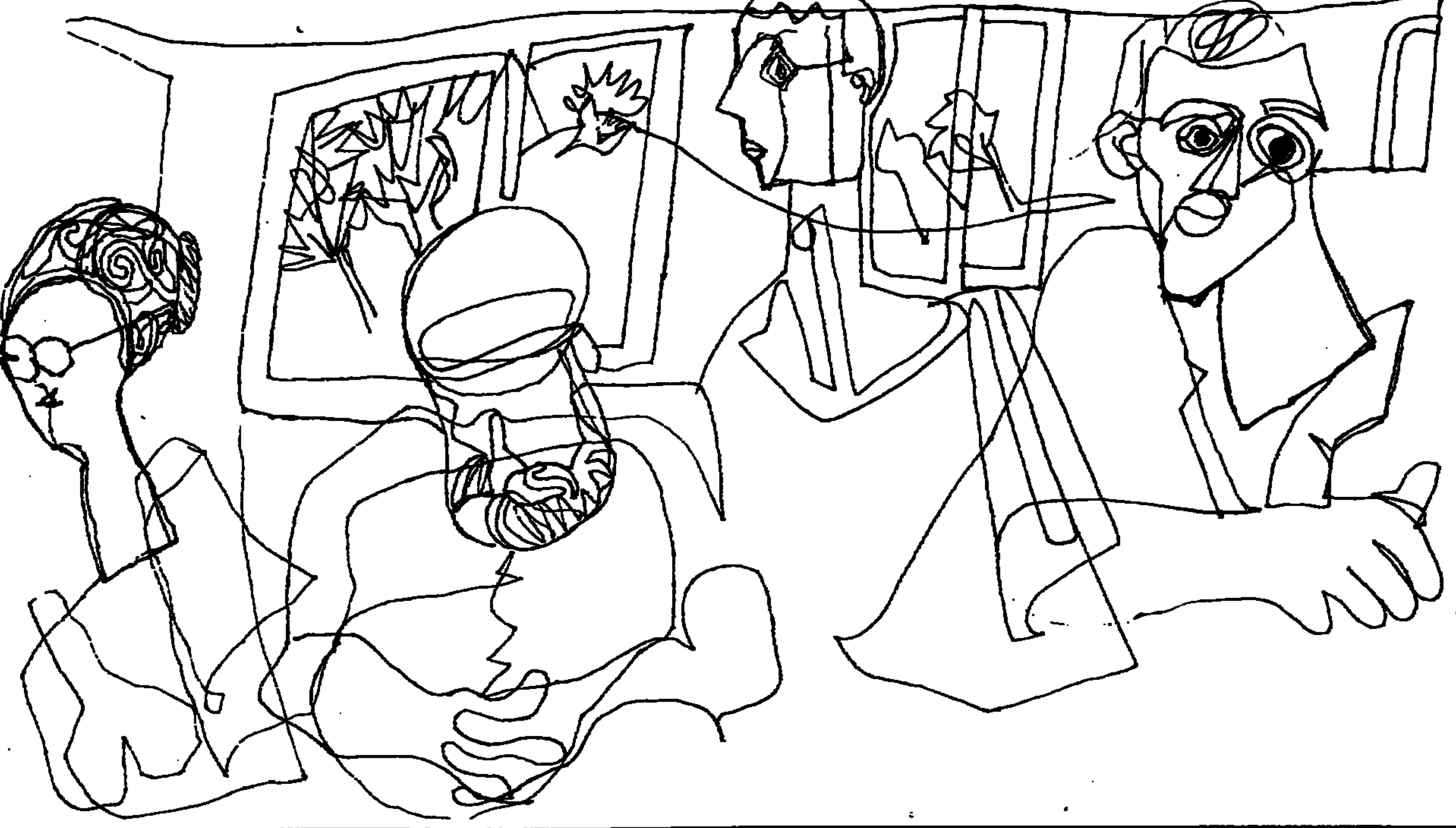
Commuting fate has turned me into an African portrait specialist, for African faces abound aboard, their dark and muscular features offering aesthetic counterpoint to the outnumbered pale-skinned Caucasians.

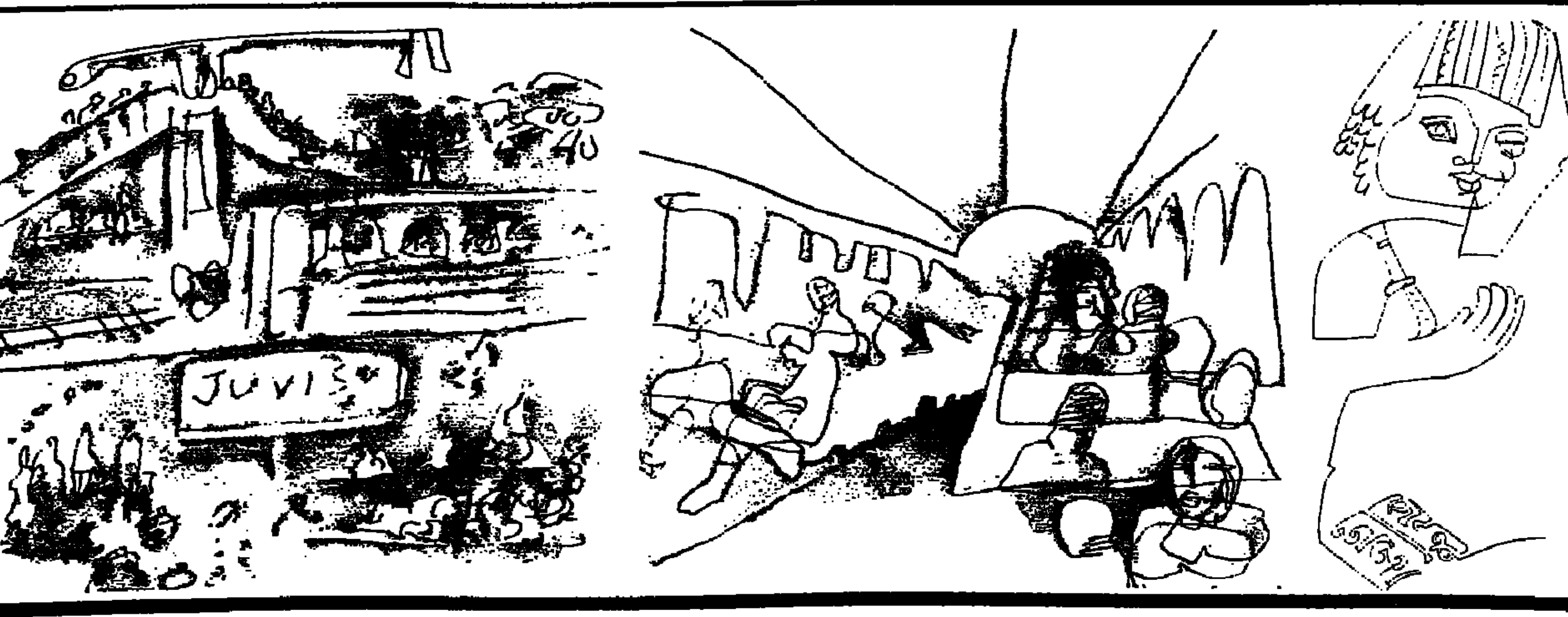
I moved to Evry after a quarter of a century of life in bustling Paris. I did not choose this suburb; I was dispatched there. The French Ministry of Culture responded to my application for a workshop with a long letter and a lease on a workshop and a new life. An atelier in a suburb; the dream of every artist. But suburbs have their own way of turning against you.

The suburb was still young when I moved there. It is almost 10 years now since I first wandered among the maze-like development of white-washed concrete blocks. I was in love. The 100-square metre studio, the view of a neighbouring forest and the splash of light filtering through an entire wall of glass bricks filled me with a new sense of freedom. Japanese, Romanian, Italian, French, and Egyptian friends share with me the same block, all of us suburban artists turned commuting veterans.

Pencil still poised above my sketchbook, I scour the seats around me for possible portraits. An errant glance out of the window tells me that I have missed my stop. Another suburban commuter spills out of the train, muttering...











photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

Windsurfers adjust their equipment on the beach at Ras Sudr before heading out into the surf. Ras Sudr's consistent winds and beautiful weather attract avid windsurfers from around the world

Surf's up

Sinai's western coast at Ras Sudr boasts world-class windsurfing in the middle of a timeless desert. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** explores

The hustle and bustle of the sweltering city calls stress-plagued urbanites from throughout Egypt to the tranquility of the Red Sea. Most of these tourists head for Hurghada or make a bee-line for Sharm El-Sheikh, completely missing the western shore of the Sinai as they hurtle by in an air-conditioned bus.

The "other side" of the Sinai remains an undiscovered jewel. Ras Sudr's clear blue waters, glorious sunny weather and serene sand beaches make it a rare pleasure for anyone seeking relaxation. But it is Ras Sudr's winds that set it apart from all other places in Egypt: the wind conditions in Ras Sudr make it a windsurfer's paradise.

As the name suggests, windsurfing depends on the wind, whose fickleness is the stuff proverbs and metaphorical turns of phrase are made of. But a remarkably consistent northwest thermal wind blows across the shore at Ras Sudr, only significantly changing direction during the *Khamaseen* — 50 days of stormy, less predictable weather in March and April. The winds in the western Sinai blow from over the mountain of Hamam Faroun to the north of Ras Sudr. As they descend from the mountains, they accelerate until they are whipped into a forceful gust as they reach the sea.

Mohamed Ihab Rashed, a young design engineer, is a former member of the national windsurfing team. He swears by the windsurfing at Ras Sudr's Moon Beach resort, which he learned about during his days on the national team. On weekends he still flies directly to Moon Beach to relive his windsurfing memories.

But windsurfing in Ras Sudr has attracted mostly foreigners. "Although the Red Sea is very popular, windsurfing just hasn't caught on in Egypt," lamented Phil Dobner, technical director of the windsurf centre at Moon Beach. Dobner came to Egypt three years ago to work at the Taba Hilton. On a trip to Moon Beach, he and his girlfriend, Lesley Dhonau, found the windsurfing conditions so incredible that they decided to settle there and open a windsurfing centre. Phil, 27, is one who would know a good windsurfing spot when he sees it: he has taught windsurfing for 10 years in his native England as well as in Turkey, Italy, Ireland and finally Egypt.

Windsurfing is an exhilarating rush: you fly over the water at up to 40 miles per hour, wind blasting up your nose and whipping through your hair, needly pellets of water whizzing by, and dolphins jumping around, challenging you for the title of acrobat of the vast blue sea. The sport is growing in popularity worldwide and its devotees are passionate about this exciting leisure activity. Dobner notes that there are over 200 windsurfing locations on the south coast of England. In the typical style of windsurfer wisdom, former Egyptian national team member Ihab resembles a latter-day Confucius as he philosophises stoically: "Once a windsurfer, always a windsurfer".

Reda Eweka, a businessman and amateur windsurfer, is among those Egyptians who have discovered the sport, and the largely untapped windsurfing treasure Egypt possesses in Ras Sudr. He goes there once or twice a month depending on his business schedule, but his basic rule is never to put off windsurfing for work. "You must relax to work. I started to 'gybe' (change direction) when I was seven and will keep on gybing till my seventies," said 34-year-old Eweka.

While not cheap, windsurfing is less expensive than other water sports, such as scuba diving. Equipment that will serve an amateur adequately can be had for about $1,000: a board, sail, boom, mast, wetsuit and harness — and of course a pair of shades to make you look as cool as you feel.

According to Dobner, "Windsurfing is a 'democratic sport'. People of all ages, and even disabled people can learn to windsurf." He adds that it only takes one hour to learn how to sail out, turn, 'gybe' and then come back. Furthermore, continues Dobner, Moon Beach provides "flat water plus strong winds, which is a perfect equation for teaching windsurfing to beginners, for amateurs to practice technical manoeuvres, and for pros to perfect difficult tricks".

This July saw 23 windsurfers gather in Moon Beach for the Vassiliki Classic Championship. It started in Greece nine years ago, and changes location each year.

Mummies back home

THE TOURISM and Antiquities Police have recovered two Ancient Egyptian mummies which two merchants were offering for sale in Khan El-Khalili bazaar. A woodwork specialist and his brother, a silverware merchant, were arrested last week while trying to sell the mummies for half a million dollars each to a policeman posing as an antiques dealer, reports Nevine El-Aref.

The plot was uncovered when a police detective informed the chief of El-Darb El-Ahmar prosecution office that the two brothers were offering the mummies for sale. The two men were placed under surveillance and a police officer posing as an antiquities trader offered to buy the mummies. The police subsequently arrested the brothers who are now in jail pending investigations.

Nasri Iskandar, general director of antiquities conservation, said that both mummies belong to noblemen or members of the royal family in the New Kingdom. The mummies are both well preserved, still bearing moustaches and hair. Gold leaves adorn the mummies' foreheads, eyes, shoulders, hands and legs.

Police believe that the two brothers stole the two mummies from a necropolis in Akhmim, with local accomplices, and transported them to Cairo hidden in a truck loaded with straw.

Other stolen antiquities found in the bazaar include a collection of canopic jars, a head of the falcon god Horus, some Islamic artefacts, such as copper swords, a number of plates, incense burners and ancient coins, all of which are now stored in the Egyptian Museum under the vigilant supervision of the antiquities police.

Travels in Egypt:

The prince of travellers

He was one of history's greatest travellers, a young Moroccan from Tangier who journeyed to the far corners of the *Islamic world*. **Jill Kamil** describes some of his experiences



An illustration of Ibn Battuta in Central Asia

His name was Ibn Battuta and, sustained by the Qur'an, he travelled with camel caravans across the desert regions of North Africa to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Anatolia and Yemen and beyond, to Central Asia, Turkey, India and China.

His observations ranged from "Chinese infidels" eating the flesh of swine and dogs, to the "overbearing" and "insolent" people in Taizz in Yemen, and the clouded heights of Adams Peak in Sri Lanka, a centre for pilgrims of four faiths where Muslims believed Adam first set foot on earth. He described a 14th century mud turreted mosque in Mali that thrived as a centre of trade and Islamic learning, dhows being built by fishermen off the Malabar Coast, and the stringent smell of spice in a Persian market.

Wherever he went, Ibn Battuta sought out pious and educated Muslims and absorbed all he was told. He in turn, regaled his listeners with tales of the exotic places he had visited: an Islamic republic in the Maldives, islands strewn in the seas southwest of India — where he became chief and married six wives — to behind-the-scenes activities of actors putting finishing touches to their makeup before performing an opera near Qanzhou in China.

It was in Alexandria that Ibn Battuta met a mystic, a Sufi, who predicted that he would travel far beyond Mecca, which was his first destination. But before he embarked for the Holy City he travelled through Egypt.

In Cairo he visited the medieval souk of Khan El-Khalili, and drifted with the thronging crowds along Al-Muezz Liddin Allah Street where vendors then, as now, sold walking-sticks, hookahs of glass and chrome, prayer rugs and saddlebags.

The famous Fishawi was not, then, the trendy coffee shop it is today, but the carved woodwork and cut-glass mirrors are those seen by Ibn Battuta. He also went to see the camel market at Imbaba, travelled up the Nile and described the places he visited, like the Upper Egyptian village of Deir El-Gharbi where the people crafted jugs of desert clay, and Luxor where he cast his eye on monuments larger and more splendid than any he had ever seen.

Ibn Battuta saw whirling dervishes, attended banquets with turbaned sultans, and travelled with a hundred horsemen across the desert.

In Baghdad in 1327 he found, in each of the 13 quarters composing the city's west side, two or three baths of the most elaborate kind, "each supplied with hot and cold running water." He also gave a detailed description of the building Al-Mustansiriyah, renovated as a school in 1961 and later joined to Al-Qasr Al-Abbasi and turned into a museum.

When he visited Basra in Iraq he noted that its mosque still preserved "Uthman's copy of the Qur'an with his blood staining the page on which occurs surah 2:131, where, tradition has it, the flowing blood of the wounded caliph stopped."

Ibn Battuta wrote: "If God decrees my death, it shall be on the road with my face toward Mecca." He donned the pilgrim's white seamless cloth, joined a caravan, and joined the swirl of humanity encircling the sacred Kaaba. He attempted the circumbulation of the Kaaba barefooted, but failed because of the "flames" reflected by the stones. However, he added: "The stone is particularly pleasing to the mouth." He earned for himself the title of *haj*.

This great Muslim globe-trotter of the Middle Ages journeyed a total of 75,000 miles, or three times the distance of his European predecessor, Marco Polo. His adventures included a shipwreck in Indian waters, plunder by pirates off Sumatra, and he was snowbound in the white winter of the Russian steppes. He died in Morocco in 1377; his last travels, in 1353, having taken him far into the interior of Africa.

Ibn Battuta sometimes fantasised about his experiences. Although he alleged to have visited the city of Bulghar, near Kazan and the Volga, for example, this has been described as a 'serious fabrication.'

So what, one wonders, were the great explorer's impressions of Egypt's most impressive monuments: the famed Pyramids of Giza. Well, surprisingly, it is doubtful he ever saw them, because he described them as cone-shaped!

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square). Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan: LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan. 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45, second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.
Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://wan.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

New City Travel is offering trips to Paris, London, Damascus and Beirut. Trips to Paris go for LE1890 for 8 days including accommodation on breakfast basis.

Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE3990 including accommodation in three-star hotels including open buffet breakfast. A week trip to Damascus and Beirut costs LE2090. The price includes accommodation in four-star hotels on breakfast basis.

Hotels

Cairo
Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.

Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

South Sinai
Sharm El-Sheikh
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.
Coral Bay Resort is offering a rate of LE120 per person for double rooms and is also offering a rate of LE700 for 7 nights including breakfast. Prices are valid until September.

Dahab
Novotel Dahab is offering a rate of LE200 per person for double rooms for three days including breakfast buffet. The offer is valid until September 1997.

Red Sea
Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Ahli do it again

With Ahli assured of the football league trophy, most of the tension is at the bottom of the premier division, as trailing teams jostle to avoid relegation. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports on the league's final week



Ahli's Yasser Rayan (standing) survives a challenge from Gomhoriet Shibeen

photo: Osama Abdel-Nabi

As we enter the 30th week of the league, one thing is certain — Ahli will be this year's league champions. With 66 points they have become unbeatable. Their closest rival, Zamalek, are trailing behind with 60 points and there is no way now that they can close the gap.

This league season is probably the longest the world has ever seen. It has stretched over a year, being postponed when games clashed with national team engagements in the African Nations Cup and World Cup qualifications. It has been a season crammed with crucial and decisive matches, as underdogs battled to stay in the premier league, and giants Ahli and Zamalek fought each other for supremacy.

Aluminum and Marrikh have already flunked out of the league, and Suez are on their way out too. One more team has to go. Corum, Gomhoriet Shibeen, Moqaweloon, El-Misri, and Canal are all possibilities — they are all busy trying to climb up the league ladder.

Because of the decisive nature of the 29th week matches, they were all monitored by the Competitions Committee of the Egyptian Football Federation. The match between Ahli and Gomhoriet Shibeen was the most crucial. It was this match which was to decide whether Ahli would soar into an unstoppable position and whether Shibeen would manage to keep their place in the premier league. A win for Shibeen, or even a draw, could have helped them better their 11th place standing and improve on their meagre 33 points. The match was characterised by an attacking Ahli side forcing Shibeen onto the defensive. The result was a 2-0 victory for Ahli.

The second crucial match pitched Zamalek against Suez. Zamalek's hope that Shibeen would pull off a miracle and defeat Ahli demonstrated that Zamalek were still optimistic about the possibility of narrowing the gap between the two powerhouses of Egypt. Had Shibeen beaten Ahli, Zamalek would have had a weak, but nonetheless real, opportunity to catch up with Ahli.

Zamalek's 1-1 draw with Suez put paid to these hopes and only served to demonstrate the extent of the Zamalek players' depression and the damage done by their conflict with management. Many of the players had not shown up to pre-match training sessions after an announcement that the management was to focus on introducing junior players in this match.

In 14th position with 29 points, for Suez the match with Zamalek was a matter of premier league survival. They have now pinned their last hopes on the forthcoming match against Marrikh in the 30th week.

Many of last week's matches were described by experts as one-sided — one team jostling for position at the top of the league table, while the other was fighting to avoid relegation. Mansoura's match against Canal, which Canal won 3-1, Ettihad Osman against Aswan (Aswan won 4-1) and Corum against Ettihad Sakandary (Ettihad Sakandary won 2-1) all fell into this category.

Rumours are flying that Ettihad Sakandary's win was the result of an under-the-table agreement, and similar accusations have been levelled at the El-Misri-Marrikh match, which resulted in a 4-0 victory for El-Misri.

In the Ettihad Sakandary-Corum match, both teams were fighting for survival. Despite the rumours circulating among fans, it seemed that Ettihad Sakandary fought hard for the three points they won from this game to compensate for their 2-3 defeat at the hands of Ettihad Osman.

Meanwhile Moqaweloon, with their new Austrian coach Joseph Berger who made several changes to the team line-up amongst the strikers, pulled off a dramatic 2-0 victory against Aluminum. With this win, Moqaweloon saved themselves from falling into the danger zone of the bottom four. Poor Aluminum, on the other hand, are now bottom of the league and certain to be relegated next year.

Ahli's last match will be against Baladiet El-Mahallah. The result is of little consequence, so the game promises to be more of a celebration of the trophy than anything else.

In the final week match between Gomhoriet Shibeen and El-Misri, Shibeen will have to win at least one point if they want to stay in the premier league. The Competition Committee of the Egyptian Football Federation has decided that all the crucial matches between teams struggling to avoid relegation will be held at the same time. If there is a tie in points, then the two teams in question will play a decisive match on 10 August. The committee has stressed that this match must end in victory for one of the teams. If there is a tie, they must play extra time, and then take penalty shots until one of them wins. If more than two teams tie in points, then the teams concerned will play a round robin on the same date.

Africa heads north

African footballers have brought a dazzling array of athletic artistry to Italian pitches, delighting fans and critics alike

Brazil's Ronaldo may have stolen the headlines, but players from Morocco, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Nigeria have been winning applause from fans and football experts alike.

Italy's Serie-A is already home to George Weah, a Liberian who was a former AC Milan centre forward and was once named FIFA's World Player of the Year. Weah's French teammates Marcel Desailly (Ghana) and Ibrahim Ba (Senegal) were both born in Africa.

Ba has already earned a place in the hearts of Milan fans, winning frontpage headlines and rapturous praise in the Italian press after his debut goal against Monza.

Inter Milan fans gave a deafening reception to Nwankwo Kanu, who has overcome heart surgery to re-start a career which seemed to have ended with the Olympic gold medal. Kanu has been joined at Inter by fellow Nigerian star Taribo West.

However, not all the attention has been centred on the big clubs. South African Phil Masinga, Morocco's Adil Ramzi and Mohamed Kallon of Sierra Leone, who have all made their mark as strikers, have chosen a different route.

Masinga who had a spell with Leeds United, and has scored five goals for newly-promoted Bari, said, "I chose Bari because they're a young team, there's a good team spirit and there are no prima donnas. I know it will be hard to win a first team place, but I will try to make the most of it when the chance comes along."

Ramzi has recently scored a hat-trick for Udinese. He also guided Morocco to victory in the African Cup at the under-20.

The promising 20-year-old from Marrakesh said: "My dream is to meet Robert Baggio. But like all Africans, I have to recognise that Weah is a symbol for us all. He has his country in his blood and in his heart. One day, I too would like to help all the Africans who struggle to survive. I've got a lot of friends in Morocco who have no work and who have problems even to get food."

Ramzi is not the only African player at Udinese. The midfielder, 22-year-old Hazem Emam, who caught the fans' imagination with his slick performance last season, is an Egyptian. Emam recently scored a hat-trick in 20 minutes during Egypt's 8-1 World Cup qualifier victory over Ethiopia.

Kallon said he found Weah a source of inspiration. "He taught me how to behave on the pitch, and off it, and what it meant to be a professional footballer," Kallon said. "A couple of months ago, he told me he considered me like a son. I was so moved that I cried."

Like many of the other young Africans who are inspired by the Liberian star, Kallon added, "With the money I'm going to earn, I want to do something for the poor, for the children. There are a lot of shortages in Sierra Leone."

(AFP)

Surfin' safari

The Vassiliki Classic Windsurfing Competition ended in Ras Sudr, Sinai, last week. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** donned her shades and caught the wave

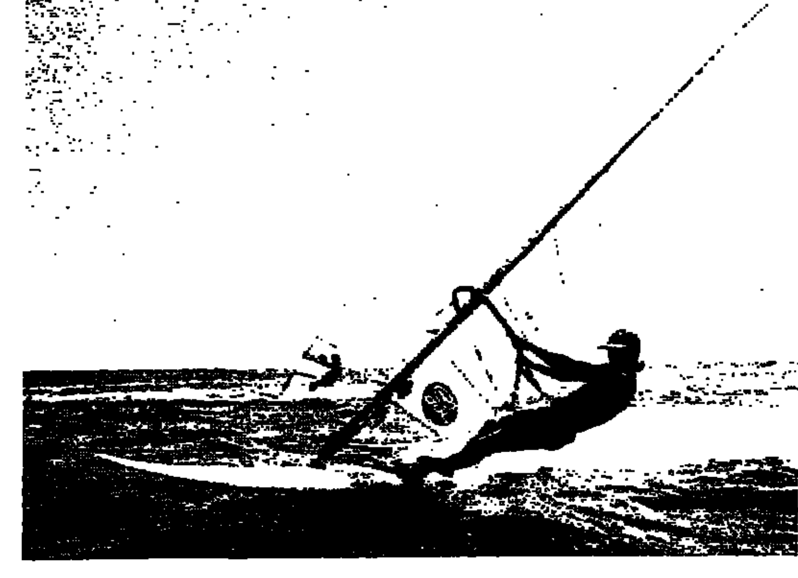


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Twenty-four competitors travelled from the four corners of the globe to battle for windsurfing bragging rights at the Vassiliki Classic in Ras Sudr, Sinai, last week. The international windsurfing competition brought together surfers who showed their stuff in a series of spectacular races.

The "Vass Class" started 9 years ago in Vassiliki, Greece, as the brain child of one tireless Englishman, Paddy Payne. With the emphasis as much on fun as serious windsurfing, Paddy has taken his annual event around the world from Barbados to Turkey and now Egypt.

Ras Sudr's unique wind patterns make it an ideal windsurfing location. And when Paddy Payne saw the peacefulness and natural beauty of this pristine area he decided to hold this year's Vass Class in Ras Sudr.

The event has become a fixture on the windsurfing calendar, with prizes well worth fighting for and a growing international reputation.

The Vass Class is a five-day event, with over 20 races in three main disciplines: speed, downwind slalom and the Giant Masterblaster series. Speed racing involves sailing as fast as possible across a 100m stretch where a specialised timing device records the surfer's speed. Unfortunately, this race had to be cancelled this year for lack of sufficient wind.

Downwind slalom is the most technically challenging event, and involves zigzagging through a 6-buoy course. The relatively short distances between marks at this year's competition favoured the lighter sailors who were able to get their speed up quicker than their larger opponents.

In the Masterblasters competition, the surfers had to sail some two miles out to sea, round a buoy (if they could find it) and blast back to the finish line on the beach. This event allowed the heavier competitors to get back into contention for the championship as the long leg out to sea gave a chance for the fat boys to pick up their speed.

Simon Bornhoft of England, a technical master and a leading instructor in England, came out on top in the overall competition, after coming in second in the Slalom series and first in the Masterblaster series. Bornhoft is a previous Vass Champ, and is a former world freestyle champion. His long-distance windsurfing records have broken into the Guinness Book of World Records on more than one occasion. Relaxing in the sun after his victory, Bornhoft reflected, "The weather here is perfect, the sea is gorgeous and the area is virgin. It was a high-class competition."

The hot favourite for the event was six-time British champion Julian Anderson, who is currently top dog on the UK professional windsurfing scene. At over 6 feet tall, Anderson had a height advantage that helped him blister at phenomenal speeds through the waves. This was Anderson's first time competing in the Classic, which earned him the nickname 'Vass Class virgin'. But he managed to snatch second place out of his rivals' grasp. Commenting on Ras Sudr and Egypt in general, the Brit quipped, "If you like surfing, you've got to like Egypt".

Paddy Payne, creator of the Vass Class, has many speed titles to his name, proving the "fat is fast" theory. Unfortunately he has never won one of his competitions, and this year he came in thirteenth. Yet even if he manages to capture the title some day, his greatest achievement will still be the founding of the Vassiliki Classic Championship itself. It is a major event that will provide windsurfing fans with serious competition and serious fun for years to come.

Moroccan gold

While the nation's first judo team were busy at the Pan-Arab Games, the second team went on a medal-winning spree at the African Championships in Morocco. **Abeer Anwar** reports



The timing of the recent Pan-Arab Games left the Egyptian Judo Federation in something of a bind. The country's top judokas were all set to go to the Games, when Egypt discovered that it would face a ban and a large fine if it missed the African Championships in Morocco, which were scheduled for the same time.

Egypt was left with just a month to muster a second team, and it was not just a matter of a lack of personnel. The Egyptian Judo Federation also had to stretch its meagre resources to cover two trips instead of one.

"The federation had barely enough money to pay for training the national team, so there was no chance of any international experience for the second team before the championships," explained Egyptian Judo Federation manager Samir El-Hadi.

The quickly-assembled second team entered a month's closed camp at the Maadi Olympic Centre, with three hard training sessions a day under the supervision of coach Galal Awad and Helmi Hussein.

Fifteen countries took part in the 20th African Championships. The line-up included some strong teams. Algeria and Morocco, for example, sent their first teams to the event, leaving their second teams to take part in the Arab Games. This decision was probably governed by the fact that, unlike the African Championships, the Arab Games were not included in the International Judo Federation schedule, so the results did not affect international rankings.

The Egyptian team, battling against opponents who in many cases were on a higher level within their own countries, nevertheless managed to give a fine performance and win four medals. Ashraf Bahgaat took the gold in the under 86kg category, Reda Khalifa won the silver in the under 78kg, and Ahmed El-Tayeb won two bronzes in the heavyweight and the open weight categories. The fifth member of the team, Sameh Ramadan, came fifth in the open weight.

The women didn't do quite so well. Amany Ismail came fifth in the heavyweight and Hanan Khater came seventh in the 48kg.

At the end of the championship, Egypt was in third place after African champion Algeria, which won five golds and three silvers. Morocco was second with two golds, one silver and three bronze. Bahgaat was particularly happy with his achievement because he had not only beaten the Mauritian favourite to snatch the gold medal, but had beaten Algeria's Seleini Yassin by a full point, an ebon.

"The team did their best," commented coach Awad after the championships. "If we had gone with the first team, we would have come first." The federation's El-Hadi also expressed his satisfaction with the performance, which was better than he had expected under the difficult circumstances.

But despite the praise, Egypt's judokas feel that their achievement has been overshadowed by gold medalist Basil El-Gharabawi's disqualification from the Pan-Arab Games for drug taking. The team and the federation are convinced there has been a miscarriage of justice. "El-Gharabawi didn't take drugs in the World Championships, so why would he start during the Pan-Arab Games?" asked El-Hadi. "He is the Arab champion at his weight and there was no strong competition at the Games." He added that the draw had been made early, so El-Gharabawi knew a while beforehand that he had one of the easiest draws in the competition.

He hinted at the possibility of an error at the laboratory. "The drug that was found in El-Gharabawi's urine sample is one typically taken by cyclists. The laboratory in France which analysed samples from the Pan-Arab athletes was also analysing samples from cyclists on the Tour de France at the same time," he said. "It's not just me trying to make a connection here. This fact was stated by Dr Reda Kazem, head of the medical committee of the Pan-Arab Games."

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

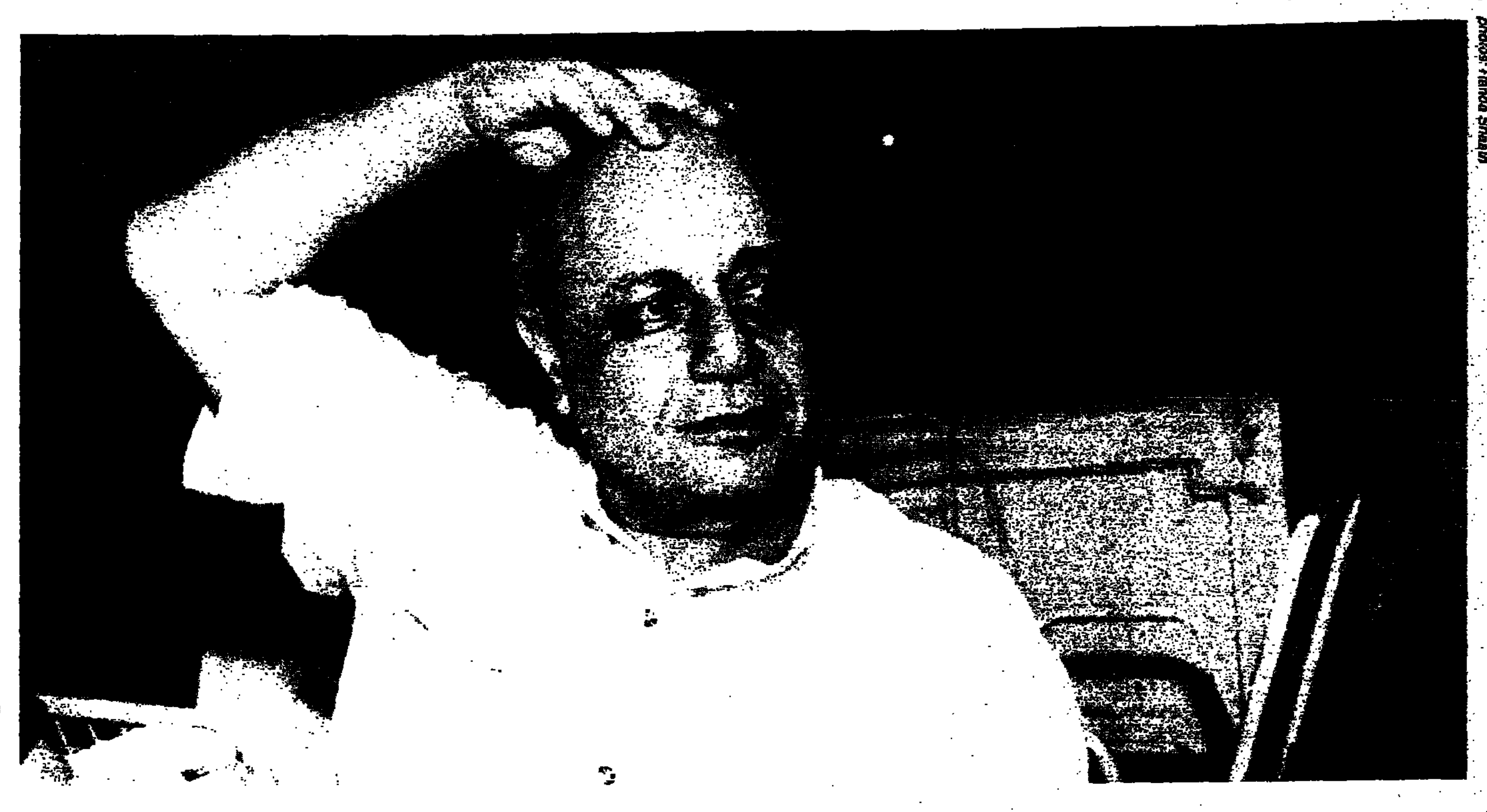


photo: Randa Shaath

Sayed Hegab:

Childhood, for Sayed Hegab, is at the core of all things

Finding the mermaid

For a long time, life seemed to him to come in two sizes: small and big. He was small: his surroundings were large. He had often heard it said that small fish are eaten by the big fish. He loved the sound of the words, and was convinced that they contained some profound truth, the meaning of life itself. He was acutely aware of his smallness, however, and, in an attempt to grow larger, he filled his eyes, ears and lungs, absorbing all the big things around him: voices, people, the way it all looked and smelled in Matariya, the small fishing village on the shores of Lake Manzala in the Delta, with its markets full of fishermen and buyers and its shores crowded with moored boats, around which ducks and geese and many little fish swam.

Today, Hegab's appetite for life remains undiminished. His job and his passion are one and the same; the songs and poetry he writes have allowed him to remain as close to childhood as any adult can. His hours are his own, and he lives at night. When the words come to him, he puts them down, and he must smile as he listens to their music. He recites: "A cigarette, and a glass". For these few minutes, he stumbles and slurs his words. Tears come to his bleary eyes. He has slipped into the role almost imperceptibly, and he slips out of it with a slight, self-deprecating laugh. He has absorbed the agit-prop that influenced him in Europe, and made it his own: he knows that the words he writes belong to people, and it would not suit them to be declaimed. But they require their own ceremonial, and he pays homage in his own, remarkable, undetectable way.



Once the fear of getting lost had left young Sayed, he loved being a little boy, but with a big boy's mind: tiny but smart; a child, and therefore embraced and protected by women, but at the same time sharp and daring enough to be counted among the men. He was recognised as bright and his family showered him with their love and attention.

They listened to what he had to say and made him feel important. Mainly, he spent his waking hours asking questions. He felt he needed to know, and the word "why" became like a magic wand, his *Aladdin's lantern*. Whenever he asked "why?", the world opened up and he discovered some marvellous secret. Sometimes, though, he did not really understand. So he kept repeating "why?" until he grew tired of the question and found another one. If his parents were too busy to shed light on some particular point he urgently wanted to grasp, his grandfather was always there to explain things with patience.

All in all, he was a happy little boy who was given ample time to grow up at his own pace. Hegab is not prepared to talk much about himself: "I have already written it all down," he says. "*A New Egyptian* is the story of my life. I am the little boy in Matariya, growing up in the '40s." Instead of elaborating, he recites some of the verses which have made him famous. "Do you know *A Fisherman and a Mermaid*?" The question is rhetorical; he is quite sure that his listeners know every verse of his popular poem by heart. The mermaids, in Matariya, bewitched fishermen with their songs, then pulled them down into the lake. "Read it," he continues, "you will know all about my poetry." He is decidedly stingy with words; maybe he is saving them for later. Then, he will need them to arrange themselves into so many attractive patterns, inviting him to play games like he used to do with the pebbles on the shores of his beloved Lake Manzala.

The legends told by the music of the vernacular of his village had enchanted his ears: the legends told by the women, the feasts, the rituals, had fired his imagination. He listened to stories about the djinns and strained to hear the faraway cries of the mermaids. He knew that he would never be a fisherman, though. He was different from the fishermen's children: he did not wear a blue *galabiya* like they did, but pyjamas, a sign that he was a schoolboy, and the son of an educated man, a government official.

His life was full of events, nonetheless, and each season brought new excitement, the arrival and departure of the gypsies, the Sufi processions and the celebrations of the holy month of Ramadan, his own circumcision and the changes that the war in Palestine brought to his village. Always, he tried to find the deep, hidden meaning of what happened.

Once upon a time... In *A New Egyptian*, Hegab remembers: "He was sitting at the lakeside, holding a piece of long, thick string. At the other end of the string was a small wooden boat, like those the small children played with. His mind was torn between the sight of his boat tossed by the waves and the questions swirling in his head. Unconsciously, from time to time, he pulled the boat to him, to put in a pebble, for there were plenty of pebbles on the shore. Then he let the boat go. The questions multiplied in his mind. The little boat's load grew heavier, and it started to sink. He found no answers to his questions..." Young Sayed shivered. He did not know if it was from the cold water or because he felt threatened by all the unanswered questions swirling in his head, questions about death, about diseases which killed innocent people, like the cholera which had killed his little brother Hamdi, not so long ago, and about wars which people went off to fight and from which they never returned.

Rescuing the little boat, he hugged it and ran home. "Without thinking or deciding, he grabbed pen and paper and started to write. The words followed one after another on the paper at a feverish pace, like his heartbeat, which was inexplicably faster. Once the words welling from deep inside had spent themselves, he felt relieved, as after a strong emotion. He read what he had written. The short lines ended in rhyming words. He understood in a vague way that he had written a poem. He felt ashamed and guilty." Hegab seemed to remember that the Qur'an condemned poetry. He did not want to go against the teaching of the Qur'an. "With cold feverish hands, he tore what he had written into tiny little bits. He threw the bits of paper over his head, as though with them, he was washing away his guilt. The poem was lost forever and cold saliva flowed under his tongue. From that day on, the delicious taste of the forbidden fruit never left his heart."

One morning, on 23 July 1952, he woke up to a revolution. Life in the village was never the same after that day. Soon, he was to leave it behind, officially to attend the faculty of engineering but then throwing away a safe future to drown in the anonymity of Cairo, one insignificant village boy among four and a half million inhabitants. His father had wanted him to be an engineer. He was on his way to becoming a poet.

In Cairo, he shares a room with friends. He thinks of Matariya. He remembers sitting with his father, reading a poem by El-Aqqad. He finds the words difficult to understand. He asks his father why the poem is so complicated; his father smiles as he answers with an Arab proverb: "In everyone's name lies part of his fate." Hegab knows that the *'aqqad* is a person who works silk into knots, shaping the smooth skeins into intricate and complex forms. Now, in Cairo, in the bare room furnished with piles of books, he wonders how much of his own fate lies in the name Sayed. It is the name his mother gave him because, when she was pregnant with him, she was visited in her dreams by El-Sayed El-Badawi.

One does not dare ask how his other name, Hegab (concealment) has influenced his life.

His real literary life began when he met "the tall, dark poet" El-Abnoudi. With him, he met another young man named Sayed (Khamis) like him, who introduced them to "the hidden treasure that embodies the life and soul of the Egyptian *fellah*: folklore." Sayed, in the company of the other Sayed and El-Abnoudi, wrote poetry imbued with the new fragrance of rich soil; the three friends became inseparable.

He went with El-Abnoudi to meet a great poet, whom they both admired and who had started writing poetry in colloquial Egyptian. The poet liked Hegab's work, and asked if he could publish one of his poems, on condition that the young man altered the end. The poem was pessimistic. These were sad times, early in the 1960s when many intellectuals were in jail, because of what they thought. The great poet, thought Hegab, probably had no desire to join the prisoners for having published his poem. From Matariya, where he was spending the holidays, he wrote to him, thanking him for his offer but explaining that he could not change the ending of his poem because his feelings had not changed.

To his surprise, both his poem — unaltered — and his letter of explanation were published in a double-page spread of the poet's magazine, and the great poet prefaced the work "with an amiable word of introduction, presenting me to the readers as a great new poet." They were not imprisoned. "Sometimes," writes Hegab, "our fear of the police is exaggerated." The police encounter did take place a little later, however, in the mid-'60s, when Hegab and a number of young university students, the intelligentsia of the next decade, were rounded up and jailed for having been too rowdy and too vocal with their criticism during the long discussions in the popular cafés which they assiduously frequented.

Hegab and his friends felt that they were doing something new, "freeing the literary life that had been locked up in classical Arabic." There was one more step to take, however, before Hegab could plunge into the freedom that life as a poet promised. He had to find a way to support himself. Having disappointed his father's aspirations of having an engineer for a son, he shied away from the idea of asking him for money. For a few months he tried being employed, but, though he did not dislike the job, he found it incompatible with the long nights he spent with his friends reading and composing poems. In the morning, he was really too tired to go to work. Hegab was hardly torn between bread and creativity. He quit the job and concentrated on poetry. The other Sayed, his friend, had told him not to worry about money, that he would take care of things, but soon Hegab was off to Switzerland where he wrote *A New Egyptian*, a testimony of the person he believed he was. His talent was starting to mature. Back in Cairo in the '70s, he started supporting himself writing songs for famous singers, plays, scripts and poems. The *Ramadan Riddles* which he wrote were a considerable success. He wrote the theme songs for several publicly acclaimed TV serials.

And now, having achieved fame, can Sayed see through the *hegab*? What does the future hold?

"Once upon a time," he says, "there was a strange fisherman wandering over the seas with a sieve in his hands. The fisherman used the sieve as a net, but whenever he caught a fish, he let it go. A passerby commented on his strange behaviour. 'Many years ago,' said the fisherman, 'I sifted all the sands of all the deserts to find what I want, but in vain. Now I am trying to find what I want in the waters of the sea.' The fisherman was looking for, but could not find, a fair friendship and a real friend." Unlike the unlucky fisherman, Hegab has found real friends. Still... that maybe is not enough. "Sometimes," he says, "I feel that we are a group of fishermen wandering together over the seas. We are seeking something very rare — a beautiful mermaid. The mermaid is a new life in a new world: a happier world, where human relations are more human. Shall we find it?"

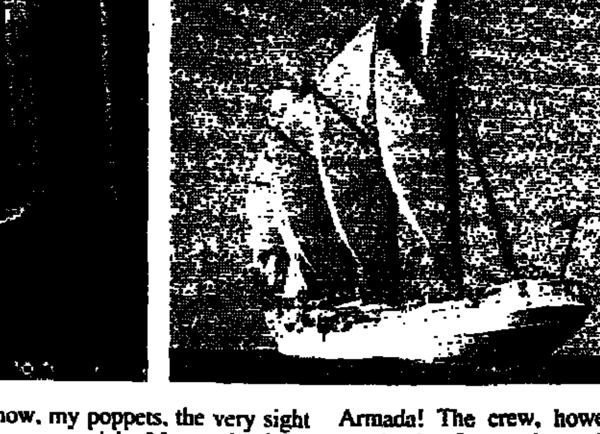
Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ A week of discoveries and excitement, my dears. I should have known it from the Tarot cards. But first things first. The invitation, when it came, sounded quite ominous. "You never know who you'll meet in **Jackie's Joint**", it warned. Well, until recently, my natural trepidation would have overcome my innate curiosity. On this occasion, however, having consulted my pendulum, I ascertained that only good surprises could be in store. Donning my favourite PVC hipsters, I trotted off, hoping for a bit of a boogie. What awaited me was more than I had dreamed of. Much to my amazement, I had to fight my way in a most undignified manner through the throng at the door. I had no idea I was so popular, dears. And who could have spread the word? A few well-placed whacks of my handbag soon discouraged my less persistent fans, and I was free to enter a world of pulsating strobe lights and enticing disco beats. Last time I saw a phenomenon so closely approximating mass hypnosis was at the Democratic Convention, where I was called upon to lead riotous crowds in my very own version of the *Macarena*. Imagine my surprise when I found my old friends, **Los del Mar**, wiggling away on the dance floor! I joined in with a lusty "heeey, Macarena", and was swallowed up by the crowds.









From left: Los del Mar, attempting to keep up with my wild gyrations; the good ship Juan Sebastian de Elcano, sails deployed; model *mother Maha*, decked out in cap and gown

♠ That bit of fun had me reaching for my smelling salts, and I was most relieved to discover that a doctor was in attendance, as I felt severe hyperventilation coming on. The eminent medic, however, was soon revealed to have a different interpretation of "bedside manner" than that to which I am accustomed. **Dr Alban**, who has won a Grammy award for his efforts, gave rousing renditions of all my old favourites, and I quite forgot my resolution to adopt a more shy, retiring attitude, becoming to a woman of my standing, when I joined him for a duet of *Hello Africa*.

♦ As you may know, my poppets, the very sight of a fish makes me sea-sick. My work nightmares often feature my nephew's toy boats, and I have been known to recoil in horror at the sight of a yacht. Yet nothing seemed amiss when I received a mysterious call to meet **Juan Sebastian de Elcano** in Alexandria. The name seemed to ring a bell, and off I went on my mysterious assignation. Imagine my reaction, then, when it was revealed to me that dear **Juan** is in fact a large boat, of the multi-sail variety, which serves as a school for the Marine Guards of the Spanish Armada! The crew, however, were so gentlemanly that I agreed to take a tour of the ship. **Juan Sebastian**, it emerged, is almost as well travelled as I am, having toured the world eight times since it (he? she?) was built in 1927. The visit was over in no time, it seemed, and I found no opportunity to address any of my new-found friends as "old salty". When I was once more safely on *terra firma*, furthermore, I found that the rolling gait of the sailors which I remember from the ports of my youth is in fact remarkably easy to emulate.

♣ Many of my young friends would do well to take a feather from the thinking cap of the industrious **Maha Fouad Imam**. When she followed her husband, **Osama Labib**, to the exciting US of A, dear **Maha** found she had nothing to do. Obviously, she had not consulted my manual, wittily entitled *How to Have Fun if You Can't Crochet*. Rather than sit about the house and mope, however, she chose to put her nose to the grindstone and study for a Masters' degree in economics. Not content with academic achievement, she simultaneously became the proud mother of a bouncing baby boy, **Ismail**.

